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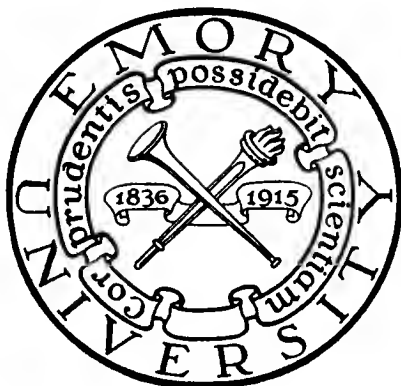
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LONDON:
CHAPMAN & HALL, 193 PICCADILLY,
1874,

PREFACE

TO THE FIRST EDITION.

IN placing the following Tale before the public, I feel it necessary to offer a few brief remarks. In the first instance, it is, as the title implies, founded on reality. But though the incidents therein related, and the character of the heroine, owe whatever interest they may possess to truth, the freedom which has been taken with both must nevertheless cause this production to be ranked amongst works of fiction; as such, therefore, it should be judged.

The object in writing it was twofold: to display the great power of Faith, even when exercised by so obscure an individual as a simple peasant girl, and to reveal one of those singular instances of heroic devotedness which often pass unheeded in the humble annals of the poor.

I believe I may safely assert that there is no exaggeration in the character of Madeleine. Her charity, self-denial, and deep faith are no ideal attributes; the real heroine possessed those qualities

in an eminent degree, and she accomplished her holy task with a calm and holy simplicity which, I fear, has been imperfectly transferred to the following pages.

In an age which, whatever may be its virtues, cannot, however, justly claim a strong share of faith, it is not, perhaps, quite useless to lay such facts before the public. This Tale may also serve to remind those who are ever ready to upbraid the lower classes for vices which are but the offspring of ignorance and misery, that, if the poor often justify the reproaches of their accusers, they can also redeem their character by displaying, as in this instance, the most noble and sublime virtues.

LONDON, Oct. 1848.

PREFACE

TO THE SECOND EDITION.

A SECOND edition of *Madeleine* is on the eve of publication.

“Would it were worthier!” I say so sincerely, and free, I hope, from that affectation of modesty which is but a poor vanity after all. But, whilst I read over this tale, and felt how much it owed to the truth that is in it—to the heroic charity and living faith of a simple peasant girl—I regretted not having made better use of that truth, and wished I had been more able to draw from the character I had chosen something of its own quiet power and serene beauty.

JUNE 25, 1851.

M A D E L E I N E.

CHAPTER I.

IN one of the wildest districts of Auvergne there exists a narrow and secluded valley, which seems shut out on every side from the surrounding world by a barrier of high and rugged hills. On one of the southern eminences arises a small village called Mont-Saint-Jean, a name which in the course of time has been extended to the whole valley. Notwithstanding the wild and solitary loveliness of this quiet spot, its existence is scarcely known beyond the mountainous region in which it lies buried, and the travelling artist passes it by, unconscious of the unexplored beauties he is leaving behind him.

The village itself is small and of little importance. Its low, straggling cottages climb up the brow of the Mont-Saint-Jean; on a high, projecting peak stands the rude and massive little church; and near it nestles, as though seeking its shelter, a low and still ruder building, known by the dignified name of the "Presbytery." In front of the church there extends an open, uneven space, called the "Place," in the centre of which arises, according to the general custom, a large stone cross. From the steps of this cross the eye of the beholder commands a view of the valley, and of a considerable portion of the surrounding country.

Wild and picturesque mountains, some entirely clothed with the dark pine, others of a deep purple hue, and some again covered with snow, arise on every side; the shadowy outline of the farthest hills mingling in the distance with the deep blue of the sky. Between those mountains and the Mont-Saint-Jean extend numerous valleys, with solitary dwellings gleaming through woods of fir and mountain ash, and rushing torrents, which come foamingly down from their wild hiding-places in the hills.

The deep and narrow valley of Mont-Saint-Jean is not without its own share of wild and romantic beauty. The rocky heights which enclose it, though barren towards their summits, become everywhere clothed with rich, deep verdure at their base, until the calm and lovely little lake, which sleeps in the lowest hollow, looks from the village on the hill like the last clear drop of water left in the bottom of an emerald cup. The beauty of the whole scene is greatly enhanced by its deep solitude. No human dwelling is to be seen in all the valley; and, though a few narrow defiles in the hills lead from it to the neighbouring villages, they are so concealed by the thick vegetation through which they wind as to be almost invisible. The village of Mont-Saint-Jean itself scarcely breaks on the solitude of this quiet spot, whence, with the exception of the church on its projecting rock, it is but imperfectly perceived. Though fertile-looking, the valley is in reality inappropriate to agricultural purposes, and for this reason, doubtless, none of the cottagers, whose dwellings are scattered on the neighbouring heights, have chosen to fix their home on its green bosom.

The character of the inhabitants of this secluded region is such as might be expected from the spot in which their life is spent. They are a hardy, half-wild race; poor, but satisfied with their lot. Their barren hills they look upon as an earthly paradise, and their world literally ends with Mont-Saint-Jean. Their subsistence is chiefly derived by cultivating

the indifferent land around them; some go in their youth to Paris, or other large cities, where they become fruiterers, retail dealers of coal, water-carriers, &c.; but, so strong is the love of their native soil, that when they have amassed a sufficient sum of money they invariably return to the place of their birth, there to end their days in peace.

Towards the beginning of the present century, and during the first years of Napoleon's reign, the period when this tale opens, the condition of the villagers of Mont-Saint-Jean was far more precarious than it is now, unenviable as it may still appear. They were plunged in gross ignorance, superstition, and poverty; and, owing to their hereditary and national obstinacy, did not seem likely to emerge from this deplorable state. Save that they had no rich landlord to tyrannise over them their condition had not been much improved since the middle ages. The great convulsions which had racked the heart of France since then appeared to have passed unheard of in quiet Mont-Saint-Jean, or at least to have left no token of their presence. The cottagers knew that something had been changed in the land, but they cared not what it was; and thus, indifferent to the surrounding world, their life might have been compared to the lake in the valley, as it lay alone in quiet, unpretending beauty, reflecting in its clear waters the surrounding hills, with their woods of pines, and, still spreading above all, the deep blue summer-sky.

It was on the margin of this limpid little sheet of water that two peasants, a man and a woman, might have been seen standing on a lovely Sunday evening in the autumn of the year 18—. The hour was full of melancholy repose. The deep, cool shadows of evening had already filled the valley, whilst the rays of the setting sun still lingered with a pale golden hue on the rocky heights. The growing twilight gave to this narrow spot vague and indefinite limits which it did not possess in the day-time, when the glad sun-

shine was abroad, lighting up every nook and crevice. The trees, which grew in fantastic groups along the margin of the lake, now looked in the gathering gloom like the outskirts of mysterious forests plunging amongst wild passes in the hills. The shadows on the bosom of the lake had already become more vast and indistinct, and the faint cry of the distant water-fowl, as it broke on the surrounding stillness, seemed to increase instead of dispelling the repose of that evening hour.

It was, perhaps, the sense of this deep solitude of nature which unconsciously influenced the two individuals already alluded to, and rendered them both thoughtful and silent. The man seemed to be about twenty-five years of age; he was tall, handsome, and his peasant's dress became him well. The natural expression of his features was evidently mirth and good-humour, but on this day they were clouded and overcast, as though by the shadow of some secret thought. His name was Maurice, and he was a native of Mont-Saint-Jean. He had lost his parents in childhood, and possessed no surviving relatives, but he lived with a farmer in one of the neighbouring valleys as *garçon de ferme*, or farmer's boy. His companion was Madeleine Guérin, his betrothed, with whom he had been attending vespers in the church of Mont-Saint-Jean, and whom he was now accompanying home. We have said that they were both standing by the lake; but the young girl, either through fatigue, or to enjoy the coolness of the evening, had seated herself on a small ledge of rock, whence she gazed abstractedly on the dim recesses of the hills, around which already floated the light mists rising from the water.

Madeleine was a few years younger than her betrothed; she was delicate and slightly made; her features had no pretension to beauty; they did not even possess that rustic grace and prettiness which often characterises the peasant girl; her cheek, though clear and healthful, was almost colourless;

her noble, chiselled brow and eyes of a deep azure blue were the only attractions of her meek countenance; her hair, of a dark, rich brown, was almost completely hidden under her close white cap, and a coarse gray mantle entirely shrouded her figure. Upon the whole, the expression of Madeleine's features was mild and grave, and, though some thought it sorrowful, to keener and more correct observers it told of a calm as deep and serene as that of the lake at her feet; like it reflecting earthly images, but living beyond them in a world of its own. Madeleine had been sitting for some time on the ledge of the rock, when she turned away her glance from the distant hills on which it had been resting till then, and fixed it on the unconscious Maurice, who, with his arms folded across his breast, seemed plunged in a dark and moody reverie.

"Maurice," said she, in a low yet singularly musical tone, and addressing her betrothed in the dialect of the country, "why are you thoughtful this evening?"

On hearing her words, Maurice started and looked up. "Am I more thoughtful this evening than at any other time?" he evasively answered.

"No," she calmly replied, "for you have been sad and given to moody thought since the month of June."

Maurice eyed his betrothed with some surprise. "Madeleine," he observed, after a short pause, "explain yourself."

"I will," she gravely replied: "it was in the month of June, at the feast of Saint John, that you first met Rosette Besson."

Maurice coloured deeply, and said, in a displeased tone, "I understand; you are jealous. I thought we had agreed that there should be confidence between us."

"It is because there must be truth and confidence between us that I speak as I do now," answered Madeleine, with the same calmness, "and that I say

again, "You are sad since the feast of Saint John, because it was then you saw Rosette Besson, whom you love."

"Madeleine," almost harshly, exclaimed Maurice, "you are a foolish girl; you know not what you say."

Madeleine sorrowfully shook her head, but replied: "You cannot deceive me, Maurice; seek not to deceive yourself. Do you remember," she added, in a low mournful tone, "my father's death-bed?"

"Yes, I remember it," gloomily answered Maurice.

"And I see it," continued Madeleine, with a fixed glance, whilst a faint flush crossed her cheek. "My poor father was already speechless, but he signed us to draw near him; he took my hand, placed it in yours, and, gazing on us with our two hands clasped in his, so died."

"For Heaven's sake, Madeleine," exclaimed Maurice, with feverish impatience, "tease me not with all this; you know that, with God's will, we are to be married next spring."

A mild surprise betrayed itself in Madeleine's upraised glance. "What!" said she, with a melancholy smile, "did you not understand me, Maurice? did you not see that when I said you loved Rosette Besson I meant to tell you you were free, and that my poor father—the peace of heaven be with his soul!—would never have joined our hands had he known that our hearts were asunder?"

"Madeleine," exclaimed Maurice, who seemed much staggered, "you cannot be in earnest."

"I have told you so already," she calmly replied; "you are free; we are no longer betrothed."

"But I do not love Rosette, Madeleine. How could I, since I never saw her but once in all my life?"

"Ay, we have known each other for years," sadly answered Madeleine, "and you have known Rosette only for one fair summer's day; and yet you love her! You love me too; but you would leave me

for ever, and never gaze on me again, merely to look upon her! How strange, Maurice, that the love which comes so suddenly should be deeper than that of many years!"

The eyes of Maurice filled with tears. "My own, good Madeleine," he fervently exclaimed, "I will never forsake you."

"Oh, I did not intend reproaching you, Maurice," gravely said Madeleine; "the fault is not yours; I merely meant to say that it was strange it should be so. But, as you love God and truth," she earnestly continued, "lie no more to your own heart, for you cannot lie to me; I have read it in your every word and glance. You love Rosette: she is good and fair, and I have prayed that she might love you too: but, even were this not to be, we are parted for ever."

Maurice eyed the young girl with surprise; he had ever looked upon Madeleine as the most gentle and passive of human beings; as one to whom the word *will* was unknown; and he now heard her with astonishment utter her resolve in a tone so decided, and yet so gentle and so meek, that it only rendered her firmness the more apparent.

"But if I forsake you," said he, "you will die with grief, like poor Catherine, when her lover went away last year."

"No," replied Madeleine, with earnest simplicity, "do not think so. I have sorrowed, but my sorrow is past; and if you are happy with her whom you love, I shall be happy too."

Maurice looked at her doubtfully, as though he mistrusted her words; but her clear, open countenance bore his scrutinizing gaze without shrinking. A cloud passed over the young man's brow. His pride was hurt, and he bitterly observed, "Madeleine, I now see that you never loved me; we part not thus from those we love."

"Whether I loved you or not, God alone knows," gravely answered Madeleine, slightly colouring;

"my father joined our hands; and, had I become your wife, I should have done my duty willingly, and with a cheerful heart. Further than this I cannot tell; for I have not loved another, to be able to say—that is love, but this is not."

"Oh!" continued Maurice, with increased irritation, "I am glad to see you bear our parting so well: it shows what you felt for me all along."

Madeleine now coloured deeply, and rose. "And what right," said she, in a tone of offended womanly pride, "have you to know whether my heart is sorrowful or at peace? Is it," she added, with melancholy bitterness, "that you may tell Rosette Besson how well you were beloved by the poor Madeleine, who is not fair like her, and whom you left for her sake?—Say, Maurice," she reproachfully continued, "is it for this?"

"Forgive me, Madeleine, forgive me," ejaculated the young man, in a penitent tone; "you are right, I love Rosette; but to see you so cold, so altered—I cannot bear it."

"I am not cold, Maurice," kindly said Madeleine. "I love you, and you love me still; grieve not, therefore, that we part; I shall be lonely at first, but I shall feel happy again when I know that Rosette Besson loves you; and indeed she almost said she did."

"Ha! what was it? what did she say?" eagerly asked Maurice.

Madeleine smiled sadly, but gently replied: "She said to me on the feast of Saint John, after dancing with you, that you doubtless had the prettiest girl of Mont-Saint-Jean for your sweetheart; and when I answered that I was your betrothed, she became thoughtful and spoke no more. Since then she has seemed to avoid me; and, whenever I address her, coldly turns away. Upon perceiving which, and marking your altered behaviour, I saw clearly that God had destined you for one another, and I resolved not to oppose His holy will."

“And is this all?” almost impatiently asked Maurice, whose ear greedily drank in every word she uttered.

“It is all,” she meekly said.

Maurice remained thoughtful for a while; then, seeing that Madeleine was standing as though she waited for him to accompany her, he took her arm, and they silently walked homewards, following the margin of the lake. They had not proceeded far, when Maurice began to speak; his heart was full of Rosette, and, though he endeavoured to check himself, her name often rose to his lips. Madeleine saw that if he refrained from speaking of her whom he loved, it was merely that he might not give her pain; and a deep, though involuntary sadness, filled her heart, as she felt how lonely now was her lot upon earth.

After walking for some time along the lake, they took a silent and shady path which led to Madeleine's dwelling, and also to the burial-place of Mont-Saint-Jean, near which it stood. On either side of the narrow and winding way arose a high bank surmounted with trees, whose waving branches met overhead, and even in mid-day shed a kind of hallowed gloom around. As Maurice and Madeleine went along, the evening breeze played gently among the tall poplars and aspens which rose above them, whilst the withered leaves rustled beneath their tread. Accustomed as Maurice was to the subduing melancholy of the place, it now seemed to come over him more strongly than ever, hushing even in his heart the dreams of love and happiness in which he had been indulging. When they had followed the path for some time, they came to a low, black door, over which arose a wooden cross. This was the gate of the cemetery. The path extended beyond it, winding around the low walls of this place of rest; but Madeleine and Maurice both seemed to pause instinctively, and went no further.

“Will you go in?” asked Maurice, as he glanced

somewhat hesitatingly at the gathering gloom of the sky.

"Yes," she thoughtfully replied, "let us once more pray over his grave together."

Maurice pushed the gate open, and they entered. There was nothing remarkable about the burial-ground of Mont-Saint-Jean, and yet it was a wild and lovely spot. It extended over a grassy slope, and was overshadowed by a few tall pines, which grew on its highest eminence, and flung their broad, waving arms to the wind. The low, ruined wall which enclosed it was overgrown with ivy and other creeping plants; all the graves were marked by wooden crosses inscribed with the name of the deceased; there was not a single tomb-stone in the whole spot, which seemed filled with the Sabbath stillness of everlasting rest. No human dwelling was visible from this retired place; it lay as though enshrined in the quiet bosom of the surrounding hills, far from the eye of man, or from aught else that might break on its deep repose and solitude. It was quite solitary when Madeleine and Maurice entered it; all the mourners had departed with the shadows of evening which now filled the lower hollows, though the rays of the setting sun still lingered among the waving branches of the pines which crowned the height.

Madeleine took a narrow path which wound amongst the lowly hillocks and fallen crosses that marked the more ancient graves, and, after following it for some time, paused on reaching a mound of earth half concealed by thickets of the wild hollyhock. She knelt down near the cross which marked the head of the grave, and her example was followed by Maurice, whose heart was troubled with a remorseful feeling, as he thought of the trust which his adopted father had reposed in him on his death-bed, and of the manner in which he was requiting it now. After a few minutes spent in prayer, Madeleine rose and slowly left the burial-ground, followed by Maurice. They silently resumed the path, which,

by a sudden turning, led them to Madeleine's dwelling, a rustic cot, backed by the same sloping bank over which the cemetery extended, though the trees by which it was partly surrounded prevented it from being discerned. It was in this lonely place that Madeleine had been brought up, and that she had resided since her father's death. When she raised the latch of the door, which had never known lock or key, Maurice paused.

"Farewell, Madeleine," he hesitatingly observed, "we shall soon meet again."

"Nay," replied Madeleine, in a low and earnest tone, "this cannot be; here we part—not for ever, I trust—but never to meet as we have met. Take it not unkindly that I say to you, Come no more. But my spirit is now at rest; it is quiet, though alone. I will not tempt Heaven by seeking for pain. I shall pray for you and for her, though I see you not. Farewell."

Maurice attempted to speak, but he could not; his voice faltered, and the words died unuttered on his lips. He took Madeleine's hand between his own and pressed it, then turned away and departed silently. For a long time Madeleine looked after him, standing motionless on the threshold of her humble home like one wrapped in a thoughtful mood. The sound of his footsteps was at length lost in the distance; he was gone, and she was now alone. The thought fell upon her heart with singular melancholy, perhaps for the first time in her life. She listened as though to catch the sound of his returning step; but he came not back, for, though Madeleine knew it not, they were parted for ever.

CHAPTER II.

MADELEINE was an orphan; she had lost her mother in her infancy, and her father had now been dead more than a year. Jacques Guérin was, during his lifetime, a schoolmaster of the most humble description, even in Auvergne. For nearly thirty years he had resided in the small cottage where Madeleine was born, and in which she now dwelt alone. It consisted of two rooms; the first and largest was the kitchen, parlour, schoolroom, and even the sleeping apartment of the schoolmaster. The second room was his daughter's; it overlooked the green churchyard, with its low hillocks and tall pines, and, during the summer-time, the young girl liked to sit spinning at her wheel near the open window.

From the first room there was a fine view of the neighbouring hills, and of a rude, brawling mountain-stream, that dashed foamingly by within a few yards of the cottage, the only human dwelling that arose on its banks. The whole scene was singularly wild and picturesque; the old mossy trunk of a tree thrown across the torrent was the only bridge which led to the opposite side, whilst a few weeping birch-trees, which grew along the rugged banks, almost dipped their waving branches into its foaming waters. High and ancient-looking hills that rose on every side gave to this quiet spot an air of additional wildness and solitude. It was here that Madeleine had passed her youth. She seldom went to Mont-Saint-Jean, unless on Sundays, to hear mass and vespers; her time was chiefly spent at home in order to assist her father, who, not being the regular schoolmaster of the village, had only a few straggling pupils on his side of the hill. As they paid him *en nature*, that is

to say, by small presents of fruit and vegetables, the gains he derived from his school would have proved insufficient for the support of himself and his daughter, but for the produce of a few acres of land which he found time to cultivate, and the unceasing industry of Madeleine, who, when not engaged in attending to the garden belonging to the cottage, was always busy at her wheel.

The young girl had learned all that her father knew, that is to say, how to read, write, and speak French, a language scarcely understood by the villagers, who used the dialect or *patois* of Auvergne. But this was the sum of Madeleine's knowledge. She had never read but two books in all her life, an abridgment of sacred history and her prayer-book. Her father and his occasional pupils were, as long as the former lived, the only beings besides Maurice with whom she held any intercourse: even to them she spoke little; her youth seemed devoted to toil and silent thought. This comparatively solitary mode of life developed the innate gravity of Madeleine's character. She could sit for hours spinning at her wheel without uttering a word, and gazing all the time in a dreamy mood on the quiet little churchyard, or on the clear mountain-stream that leaped down from the rocks as if possessed of a living spirit. Though she was silent and loved solitude, Madeleine was not either of a melancholy or of an unsociable disposition. When she sat in the sunshine near her father's door she always had a kind word and still kinder smile for the villagers who might chance to pass by; but, as she asked no questions and gave brief replies, those conversations, if such they might be called, never lasted long. She seemed, indeed, like one who lived apart in a world of her own; her wishes were as limited as her literary knowledge; she had never once in her life been beyond the hill on which the village of Mont-Saint-Jean arose. That there were other villages, and even towns and cities, she knew; she believed in them as we do in any distant country, but she

never expressed a wish to visit them. Had she been confined between the torrent and the green church-yard, her inward world of thought would still have been wide and deep enough for her meditative spirit.

Madeleine was, however, far too ignorant and unsophisticated to understand the beautiful in nature—the only beautiful which had ever come under her notice. She had been accustomed to it since her birth, and she saw and felt it, though she knew not why nor how. Had she been asked if the sunset on the hills was fair, she might have been at a loss for a reply, and yet she had gazed on it evening after evening until its loveliness and that of the surrounding earth and sky had sunk deeply into her heart, filling it with inward peace and love. So little was she conscious of what passed within her, that when a peasant-woman of Mont-Saint-Jean once asked her why it was that she seemed so fond of listening to the wind as it swept down from the hills round her father's cottage, Madeleine looked up with surprise, and, after reflecting for a while, answered that she knew not; and yet she had listened to it for hours at a time as it moaned like a human voice among the distant hills, or waved to and fro the branches of the weeping birch-trees that grew near the torrent.

Her solitary life had given Madeleine a taste for singing long and almost interminable ballads in the *patois* of Auvergne, sometimes relating a pathetic and melancholy love-tale, but oftener still some wild and poetic saint's legend. Her father had taught her to sing a few of those canticles and ballads in French. One of them, the well-known story of the pure and holy Geneviève of Brabant, who, banished from her husband's court, spent ten years in a forest with her child, waited upon by the faithful fawn, Madeleine seemed never weary of repeating. The history of the penitent Magdalen, and the mournful *complainte* of the Wandering Jew, were also among her favourites. Her voice, though low, was clear and musical; and when some passing peasant heard it arise in the

silence of the hills, wakening with that plaintive monotonous tune, and those words of an unknown tongue, the echoes of the quiet churchyard, he often paused to listen as he gazed on the thoughtful maiden, wondering what could be the theme of her endless song.

It was thus that Madeleine's dreamy youth and childhood passed away. She was twenty when she lost her father. Maurice, an orphan of Mont-Saint-Jean, had been reared up by the old schoolmaster almost as his own child, and he died with the belief that he loved Madeleine with a more than brotherly affection. The impression produced upon her betrothed by the sight of Rosette Besson had shown Madeleine the truth; she had brooded over it in silence for several months, at the end of which she released Maurice from his engagement in the manner described in the preceding chapter. It was not long before what had happened was known in Mont-Saint-Jean. Some pitied Madeleine, and blamed Maurice; others declared they had long expected that matters would end thus; and, whether through curiosity or a more kindly feeling, a good many made the churchyard path their way. They found Madeleine sitting at her door in the sunshine, spinning and looking as usual. To those who spoke to her of Maurice, she merely replied, "It was not the will of God that we should be man and wife: His holy will be done; may Maurice and Rosette be happy!" Her whole demeanour was so different from what had been expected, that many persons asserted Madeleine had never loved her betrothed; instead of reproaches, she breathed words of love and peace, and those who had at the utmost expected her to be resigned, found her apparently as calm and serene as ever.

To say the truth, although religion and solitude had given a strong poetic colouring to Madeleine's mind, there was too much simplicity and earnestness in her nature to leave room for romance. She saw life as it was, without exaggerating to herself either its joys or its sorrows. When her father died, she grieved

long for his loss, and often felt lonely and sad ; but every night whilst remembering him in her prayers, she said to herself, "It is the will of God," and with these few words the bitterness of her sorrow seemed to pass away. This was all Madeleine's philosophy. Those who thought, however, that she had not felt keenly the loss of her betrothed's affection wronged her. She had sorrowed over her loneliness in silence, and sadly wondered why Maurice did not love her as he loved Rosette ; but, alas ! she was no novel heroine, and her life could not become a blank, like that of Shakespeare's maiden, because she was no longer loved. She felt that this earth would be as green, and the sky as serenely pure, now as they had ever been before, and, though she was sad, she could not resign herself to cheerless gloom and melancholy for the rest of her days. Perhaps her thoughts did not take exactly this form ; such, however, was their substance. Poor Madeleine would have been pronounced an imperfect being by many individuals ; for, though she loved truly and tenderly, with all the fervour of a woman's heart, she was not capable of feeling that intensity of passion which is so often only another name for selfishness, and makes two beings delight in one another to the exclusion of the whole world.

The poetry of Madeleine's mind was naturally strong, though scarcely developed ; still its pure, healthful tone pervaded her whole being ; it was the poetry of nature, full of hope, trust, and gladness, and widely different from the morbid feeling which has often usurped the name. It is scarcely necessary to say that of those nice distinctions Madeleine herself knew nothing ; poetry for her was any rude rhyme which might be sung to a still ruder air, and of prose she was as naïvely ignorant as the renowned Monsieur Jourdain himself.

Madeleine's religious feelings had partly taken the tone of her mind and partly given it ; with the differences of creeds or dogmas she never troubled her-

self; her faith was that of a child, implicitly believing all that its teachers tell; but, though she keenly felt the poetic beauty of religion, she had only a very slight portion of mysticism,—even in this she was eminently practical. Her soul overflowed with a boundless love of God; but that love was not satisfied with remaining in heaven; human-like, it returned to earth, and spread itself over every earthly creature. Though free from mystic tendencies, Madeleine delighted in mental prayer, which to her was thought. It was, besides, the only mode in which she could relieve her heart from the many feelings with which it was crowded. No one in Mont-Saint-Jean could have understood her; how could they, when she did not understand herself, and would have been unable to express her feelings by language? Thus it was that the thought of God was seldom away from her mind; but it brought no terrors with it; it never dwelt there save as a pure and holy feeling of love. Though her life might thus in one sense be said to be spent in prayer, Madeleine had set apart a certain daily portion of time which she devoted to that holy exercise; this was towards twilight, when it grew too dark for her to work any longer. Then, in summer-time especially, she would kneel before a small crucifix near an open window, and, often allowing her gaze to wander from the sacred image to the clear blue heavens as they fast filled with countless stars, she repeated in a low tone some simple litany or orison. But her lips alone uttered the hallowed words, for in her heart there dwelt a silent prayer of love still far more pure.

If we have been thus explicit in drawing at some length the chief traits of Madeleine's character, it is not merely that she is to act a leading part in this history, but also because she belonged to that numerous class of beings whose thoughts are never expressed by words but by deeds, and who pass away from earth unknown, leaving the mystery of their nature a mystery still.

It has already been observed that the general belief in Mont-Saint-Jean was that Madeleine had felt little or no grief for the loss of her betrothed. But a peasant girl named Marie Michon, who lived among the hills on the other side of the torrent, and who happened to be Madeleine's nearest neighbour, thought otherwise. To her it seemed that the school-master's daughter looked more sad or more thoughtful—which she could not tell—since Maurice no longer came to her cottage. When she passed by her door she found her at work as usual, but she missed her gentle though melancholy song, and noticed that her reverie seemed to grow deeper every day. Marie was the daughter of a poor peasant, and a kind of friendly, though very limited, intercourse had sprung up between her and Madeleine. She was a short, thick-set girl, with a grotesque and good-humoured countenance. Though she might certainly be termed one of the happiest and most contented of human beings, she entertained, nevertheless, a painful consciousness of her want of personal attractions, and often alluded to the fact as though she would willingly have doubted it. The coarse jests which were continually made at her expense were not calculated, however, to leave her any illusion. Marie Michon appeared to take all this raillery in good part. She knew that to seem hurt or offended would only add to the satisfaction of her ill-natured antagonists, and increase the persecution; but every word which reminded her of her ugliness fell on her heart with singular bitterness. Still it never occurred to her that those who took such a mean advantage of her infirmities were to blame. She felt that if she had been handsome she would not have had to suffer from their remarks, and she laid all the fault to her unfortunate want of good looks.

If Marie had been asked why she took pleasure in Madeleine's company, she would have found it difficult to answer correctly: Madeleine was silent and reserved, and always carefully avoided speaking of

the affairs of others ; now Marie, though exceedingly good-natured upon the whole, was somewhat of a gossip, and never scrupled, unless in the presence of her friend perhaps, from making remarks on the behaviour of her acquaintances. She might walk a league to oblige a neighbour ; but this would not prevent her from observing to the first person she met afterwards that " Joseph's wife did not keep her house clean, and was a great scold." This difference of disposition rendered the conversations of Marie and Madeleine exceedingly short and uninteresting. But the secret of Marie's friendship for the school-master's daughter was that she was perhaps the only person who had never reminded her by word or look of her want of attractions. Marie was not humbled in Madeleine's presence by the sense of her personal inferiority ; nay, she sometimes fancied that she was almost her equal in point of good looks. It is true that Madeleine was not pretty, and Marie knew,

" For quickly comes such knowledge,"

that there was not a woman in the village who had hair like her own ; but that hair, which would have been invaluable to a fashionable lady, was almost thrown away on the peasant girl, for no one ever saw it. Occasionally, however, Marie gave herself the satisfaction of displaying it before Madeleine, either pretending that it wanted to be settled, or that her cap was not right on her head, and allowing her dark silky tresses to fall down around her until they formed a natural mantle which a queen might have envied.

On those occasions Madeleine never failed to exclaim, " Oh ! Marie, how beautiful your hair looks to-day ! " Upon which Marie would colour up with glad surprise, for to her a word of praise seemed an ever new pleasure, and for one day at least she would feel happy to think she really had something that could be admired. But gratified vanity was not the only feeling that made Marie seek the company of Madeleine ; she loved her for her unvarying gentle-

ness, and at the same time looked upon her with instinctive awe as a being above human fears, living as she did alone near that old churchyard.

"Do you never feel afraid?" she one day asked of her.

"Afraid of what?" simply replied Madeleine.

"Of the spirits of the dead," answered Marie, casting a terrified glance towards the neighbouring graves.

"No, I do not fear them," calmly said Madeleine, for she was not so far above the superstitions of her native hills as to deny the existence of spirits; "if they are evil," she continued, "God will not suffer them to injure me, and the spirits of the good will rather watch over me and protect me from harm. I should like to see a good spirit," she added, in a thoughtful tone.

Marie opened her eyes very wide, and wondered to hear this; she said nothing, but from that time her awe of Madeleine increased, and she almost looked upon her as one who held communion with the other world. Although she did not say as much to her acquaintances, her hints on the subject, added to Madeleine's strange and solitary mode of life, caused the villagers to look upon her as a being apart from themselves.

One day when Marie had crossed the torrent as usual in order to pay her friend a visit, she found her engaged in conversation with a travelling pedlar. Neither Madeleine nor the stranger seemed to notice her approach, and instead of joining them Marie silently entered the small garden which extended between the cottage and the churchyard. Although such was not her intention, she thus overheard part of their discourse.

"I have seen Maurice," said the pedlar.

"Is he well?" asked Madeleine.

"He is, and greets you kindly."

"How is Rosette Besson?" she continued, after remaining silent for a while.

The pedlar made no reply.

"I understand you," said Madeleine, in a low, mournful tone, "they are married. May God bless and render them happy," she meekly added, after a long pause.

The pedlar loitered about the door as though he felt unwilling to depart, and at length observed, "I suppose you have no message to give me?"

"Yes, I have," she calmly replied; "tell them that you found me here in good health, spinning on the doorway, and repeat to them the words I have said."

The pedlar, merely bidding her farewell, shouldered his pack and departed. Marie was much concerned by what she had overheard; she felt for Madeleine, and longed to go to her, but dared not. She at length left the garden and drew near, but Madeleine was so deeply absorbed in thought, though she was still spinning abstractedly, that she neither saw nor heard her friend. Her usually serene features now wore a slight shade of sadness; she gazed fixedly upon the mountain-torrent, but her mind was evidently far away. After waiting for some time to attract her notice, Marie, seeing her still in the same state of abstraction, slowly and silently left the place.

The following day Marie did not fail to pass as though by chance opposite Madeleine's cottage; she entered into conversation with her, but, though she longed to speak to her of Maurice's marriage, and to tell her that he had left Mont-Saint-Jean, and was now living with the family of his wife, besides all the particulars of the wedding which she had industriously collected, she found no opportunity of mentioning the subject, to which Madeleine, who seemed in her usual state of mind, made no allusion.

Yet from that day forward Marie Michon thought that there was something changed in Madeleine; she was not more sad, but rather more grave than before; at times her pale cheek flushed and her deep blue eyes kindled as though she were stirred by some

emotion within; often too she would sit in the same attitude and gaze on the same spot for hours, like one indifferent to surrounding objects, and wrapped up in the shadow of some solemn and lofty thought. Occasionally, when Marie called upon her, she missed her from the doorstep, and found her within kneeling before her crucifix, and so deeply absorbed in prayer that she remained unconscious of her presence, the more so as the young girl always drew reverently away, hushing the sound of her footsteps and drawing in her breath, for, as she averred, Madeleine then wore a look so pure and holy that she seemed more like a saint than like anything human. Far however from relaxing in her usual labours, Madeleine now worked incessantly; her wheel might be heard by the passer-by at break of day, and the light in her cottage showed that she toiled until a late hour of the night. This increased industry caused much speculation in Mont-Saint-Jean; for, what with the produce of her garden, the price she received for her labour, and the small income which she derived from the few acres of ground her father had left her, Madeleine had certainly enough to live upon. Some said she was going to get married, without being able to guess to whom, and asserted that, being a prudent, thrifty girl, she wanted to prepare for her new state by hoarding up a little fortune.

A fact that gave some confirmation to this report was, that towards the end of autumn Madeleine purchased several sacks of flour and of dried vegetables; she even got in some wine, and converted her narrow cottage into a kind of storehouse. It was also ascertained that one of the pedlars who crossed the country towards the beginning of the cold weather, had sold her a large assortment of clothing for winter wear. But Marie Michon, who was known to be well informed, asserted that no one ever came near Madeleine's cottage, so that, though slowly and reluctantly, the belief in her approaching marriage was given up by the wise heads of Mont-Saint-Jean. Some of

those individuals who are always able to explain everything soon surmised, however, that the silent and solitary Madeleine knew more than people thought, and, foreseeing that the coming winter would be one of unusual severity, thus prudently provided herself beforehand with everything needful. A woman more inquisitive or less in awe of Madeleine than the other villagers asked her one day if this were true.

"I know nothing of the winter that God will send us," gravely said Madeleine, who seemed unwilling to give any other explanation of her conduct.

CHAPTER III.

THE winter set in with unusual severity ; of course, notwithstanding her denial of the fact, Madeleine was asserted to have foretold it, and she accordingly began to be looked upon as a gifted being in Mont-Saint-Jean. Towards the beginning of November there was a heavy fall of snow, which rendered many of the paths along the hills entirely impracticable. Still Marie Michon continued to visit Madeleine. She did not always venture to cross the fragile bridge which led to her dwelling, but there was a safer one about a league farther down the stream, and she never hesitated walking that distance in order to see her friend, though Madeleine frequently remonstrated with her on the subject.

One morning Marie came as usual, but though the day was fine and clear when she set out, the sky grew so clouded and overcast towards the afternoon, and the snow, which then began to fall, gave so threatening an aspect to the weather, that she did not like to venture to return home, and was easily induced by Madeleine to spend the day with her, and postpone her departure until the next morning.

Marie was delighted with this proposal ; her parents, she said, would not feel uneasy, for they knew where she was, and could easily guess, on seeing the state of the weather, why she did not return. Madeleine smiled on hearing her speak thus, for she knew that it was more the wish of remaining with her than the fear of being lost in the snow, that had induced the young girl to stay.

Marie had probably reckoned that by spending the day with Madeleine she would have an opportunity of speaking to her, and of learning a great many circum-

stances of her past life, of which she was still ignorant. In this, however, she was mistaken; Madeleine listened to her patiently, but she spoke little, and seemed even more abstracted than usual. Contrary to her custom, she sat in the inner room, near the window, and often paused in her work to look on the falling snow. Marie could not help asking her why she did so.

"I am thinking," answered Madeleine, "of the widow who lives on the hill."

"Ah! yes, up there," exclaimed Marie, glancing towards one of the neighbouring heights, on the summit of which arose a solitary cottage. "Why, the poor woman must suffer greatly from the cold; and, if the snow should block her in, how dreadful it would be!"

Madeleine made no reply, but she looked long and earnestly at the widow's cottage; though it was partly covered with snow, a thin curling smoke still arose from its tall and narrow chimney.

Marie's fancy was excited; she loved the terrible and the marvellous, and always had a host of legends on any kindred subject at her command. She now began relating to Madeleine strange and melancholy histories of snow-storms, of travellers who had been lost in them, and of cottages that had vanished for ever, with their inhabitants, being buried many feet deep by the snow; all of which narratives were perfectly authentic, as they had been handed down in Mont-Saint-Jean, almost as she told them, for several generations. The moment was a propitious one to give such recitals their full effect. It was night, but a cheerful fire blazed on the cottage hearth, near which sat Madeleine, busy at her wheel; without, however, all was dark and dreary; the snow fell fast and was still drifted by the fitful gusts of wind, which moaned dismally among the old churchyard trees. Though Madeleine did not seem much affected by Marie's stories, with which she was already familiar, the young girl noticed that when she spoke

of the wolves which had lately been seen prowling around the woods, near the eastern hill—that on which the widow's cottage stood—her friend listened to her with deep attention.

It snowed all night, and even during the greater part of the following morning. At about twelve o'clock there was a moment of cloudy rest; the wind ceased, but the sky still wore a dull, gray hue. Marie was pondering in her mind whether she ought to go home or not, and wondering if her parents felt much alarmed at her long absence, when Madeleine, who had been for some time in her room, now came out into that where her guest was sitting near the fire. The young girl noticed with much surprise that she was dressed as though to go out, having her gray cloth cloak wrapped around her, and holding a long staff, with an iron spike at one end of it, in her hand.

"Why, Madeleine, wherever are you going?" cried Marie.

Madeleine, who was now busy putting some provisions into a basket, calmly replied, "To the eastern hill."

"To the eastern hill!" repeated Marie, with a bewildered glance, "whatever can you want there?"

"I must see the widow," said Madeleine; "this whole morning the smoke has ceased to arise from her chimney."

Marie glanced towards the hill; the cottage was almost buried in the snow, but, though the chimney was still visible, it had ceased to pour forth the thin, curling smoke which announced that a living being inhabited that dreary dwelling. "Perhaps she has no more fuel," hinted Marie, "that may be the reason that her fire is out."

Madeleine shook her head: "It is but two days ago," she observed, "that the priest sent her a dozen of faggots; they passed before my door, and dame Ursula told me they were for a poor sick widow on the hill; she cannot have burned them all yet; she must be either very ill, or, perhaps, already dead."

"Madeleine," anxiously observed Marie, "the snow is at least two feet deep; depend upon it, you are not the only person who has thought of this poor woman, yet you see no one ventures to go near her; and if strong men did not dare to climb up there, what can you do?"

"Attempt it," calmly answered Madeleine, moving towards the door. But Marie, taking hold of her gray cloak, endeavoured to detain her; "Madeleine, my dear Madeleine," she exclaimed, in broken accents, "oh! do not go, for the blessed Virgin's sake; for if you do, something tells me I shall never see you again."

Madeleine looked back with a kindly smile on the weeping girl.

"Marie," said she, gravely, "trust me, if God blesses, as I hope He does, the task which I have taken upon myself, He will not suffer me to perish now. This is but the beginning of that work which must be the work of my whole life. Nevertheless, pray for me; you will know that I am safe when the smoke rises once more from the widow's cottage."

Madeleine bent towards Marie as she spoke, gently pressed her lips upon her brow, and, freeing herself from her grasp, she swiftly descended the stone steps, and took the path which, after winding round the little cemetery, led to the eastern hill. It was in vain that Marie called her back, earnestly conjuring her to return. Madeleine did not even look behind, and was soon hidden by the churchyard wall from the sight of her friend.

The task which Madeleine had undertaken was both difficult and dangerous. The widow's cottage stood on one of the highest peaks of the eastern hill, and, though the distance which now divided her from it was apparently short, it was rendered considerable by a deep ravine, which compelled her to turn round the base of the hill in order to take a narrow winding path leading to its summit. In ordinary weather this would not have happened, for Madeleine, who

was exceedingly agile, and well acquainted with the locality, could easily have ascended the hill even on its steep and rocky side, now entirely covered with snow. In order to reach the path already alluded to, she was obliged to cross a wide plain, skirted on one side by a wood of some extent, which grew at the foot of the hill. When she entered this plain Madeleine was struck with its dreary and solemn aspect; accustomed as she was to such scenes, the silence and the solitude of this struck awe into her heart, and made her involuntarily pause to look around her before she went on. A wide sheet of dazzling snow extended before her, mingling in the distance with the faint, shadowy outline of the hills, which in their turn almost vanished on the dull gray of the sky. The same dim and indistinct hue seemed to pervade the whole landscape. On her right arose the wood already alluded to; it covered the lower portion of the hill, and the spectre-like looking forms of its tall pines, clothed with snow, only stood in faint relief on their white background. The sounds of beast or bird, which usually broke on the silence of this wild spot, were now hushed; the voice of the wind itself had died away among the distant hills; no trace of a human being was to be discerned. All was solemn stillness and undisturbed solitude.

After gazing around her for a few minutes, Madeleine continued her journey, casting a glance into the dim recesses of the wood as she passed it by, and occasionally pausing to listen and ascertain if it was a distant howling, or the far voice of the wind which reached her ear. She walked for about an hour without meeting with any serious obstacle to her progress, though she noticed with uneasiness the increasing gloom of the sky. When she reached that part of the hill where the path which was to lead her to its summit should have been, Madeleine could see no token of it. It was not only hidden by the snow, but even the hollow along which it wound was completely filled up. The whole hill, though Madeleine

knew it to abound with small clefts and ravines, which bordered the path on either side, now wore the same smooth and treacherous covering of dazzling whiteness. Her first act was to endeavour to ascertain where stood a small wooden cross which rose at the foot of the path, and from which she knew she could not be far away, though it was now entirely hidden. After driving her long staff into the snow for some time, without discovering the object of her search, she at length felt resistance in a particular place, and, clearing away the snow in that spot, found to her satisfaction that it was occasioned by the summit of the wooden cross, which, though partly bent down by the wind, still stood in its usual place. This fact showed Madeleine that the snow was not quite so deep as she had thought at first, and encouraged her to begin her ascent.

The path which led to the summit of the hill took the form of the letter S ; the cross marked the lower point, and the widow's cottage the upper one ; a stunted beech which grew in one of the windings and a rock which arose on the other side also acted as land-marks. Madeleine's fear was, not of mistaking the right path, but of being surprised by the snow before she had reached the end of her journey. She now began her ascent without loss of time, but she proceeded with the greatest caution, sounding the depth of the snow and partly clearing it away as she went along. Madeleine possessed both courage and patience ; she was not therefore disheartened by the difficulties or the tediousness of her ascent, but she was not naturally strong, and even the light basket which she carried considerably impeded her progress. Though she would gladly have gone on without pausing, she was occasionally obliged to rest in order to recruit her failing strength. When she then looked back on the way along which she had come, Madeleine saw with an anxious feeling that it was as nothing in comparison to the distance over which she had yet to journey. She also knew that

time waned apace; it was at least two hours since she had set out, and she could already see some lights twinkling in the valley on the other side of the hill. More than once she glanced towards the widow's cottage; it still wore the same air of death-like repose which had induced her to undertake her present expedition; and every time she looked on it, the thought of the sufferings its lonely tenant might then be enduring urged her on to new efforts.

Madeleine had toiled about half way up the hill when she perceived with great uneasiness that it was beginning to snow. She was aware of the danger of being surprised by a storm in this desolate spot, and hastened on, hoping to reach the goal of her journey in time. In less than a few minutes, however, she found herself enveloped in one of the densest falls of snow which she had ever witnessed, even in this mountainous region. It was in vain she endeavoured to advance, the thick flakes which the wind drove full in her face almost blinded her; she instinctively turned round to look for some place of shelter, but none met her eye. A projecting rock which had attracted her notice a few minutes before, had now disappeared; the valley and its lights, the widow's cottage, the very path she had been following, all were gone, or rather all had vanished from her view in the surrounding mist: she could see nothing but the white snow as it sped by her with the swiftness of an arrow on its way. A chillness now fell upon Madeleine's heart; she felt that she stood alone on that snowy peak, alike removed from human ken or human aid. Already a swift insidious torpor crept over her wearied frame, her eyes involuntarily closed, and that treacherous sleep which is the forerunner of death was beginning to allure her, now that the exertion of toiling up the hill no longer rendered her insensible to the intense cold.

Madeleine possessed that coolness which constitutes real courage. She knew the exact peril of her present position, and could look her danger in the face

with as much calmness as though it were not for her a matter of life or death. She saw that she must decide on remaining where she was, or on continuing her ascent, and a moment's thought showed her the danger of either course. If she remained, it was only too probable that, in spite of all her efforts to keep awake, she might fall asleep and be frozen to death; if, on the contrary, she went on, there was the risk of losing her way altogether, and of being led by some treacherous snow-drift over the edge of a ravine or precipice; still this last course afforded a chance of safety, and she soon decided on adopting it, first fervently imploring the blessing of Heaven. All that Madeleine knew about the way she was to take was, that she must face the snow, for she had noticed when it began to fall that the wind blew it towards her from the widow's cottage. Although this fact served to guide her, it also impeded her progress; her clothes were now thoroughly wet, and, being thus rendered heavier, clung to her limbs. More than once did Madeleine stop through very weariness, though the gathering darkness told her that every pause might be death; she never rested long, however, but soon resumed her ascent, toiling blindly on with a desperate energy, inspired by the instinct of self-preservation, and a still more hallowed motive. Half an hour thus elapsed, during which Madeleine, though often driven back by the eddying gusts of snow, had, by dint of perseverance and heroic efforts, made considerable progress. But her sinking limbs at length refused to bear her any longer. The wind had changed, and she knew not where she was, yet she strove to go on, hoping still in the very face of death; the effort, however, was vain, and, utterly exhausted, Madeleine sank down on her knees in the snow. She instinctively extended her hands to seek for support, and as she did so she felt a hard, flat substance resisting her touch. Madeleine uttered a cry of glad surprise; the goal of her journey was reached, for, though she had not seen it under its covering of snow, the cottage now

stood before her. New strength seemed poured into her; she rose hastily, felt for the door, removed the snow which lay heaped around it, and, raising the latch, quickly entered. By the faint light which still reigned within, she could discern the form of the widow extended on a low pallet, and apparently lifeless. In a second, and without a thought of self, Madeleine drew a flask of wine from her basket which she had carried through so much danger, and hastily applied it to the mouth of the widow, from whose form she perceived that life had not yet fled. When she had succeeded with some difficulty in pouring a few mouthfuls down her throat, she began chafing her frozen limbs until she had restored to them a certain degree of animal heat. As soon as this was effected, she struck a light from the flint she had prudently brought with her, and applied it to a few faggots which she threw in the chimney. In less than a second a cheerful blaze sprung up from the hearth and filled the cabin with its genial glow. Madeleine's first look was for the sick woman, who now seemed to be slowly reviving.

CHAPTER IV.

As her dim and glazed eyes recovered the power of sight, the widow looked around her like one awakening from a long and deep slumber; but when her glance fell upon the form of Madeleine she started slightly, and, raising herself by an effort on her elbow, gazed on her visitor with evident astonishment.

"Who are you?" she at length exclaimed, in a low and hollow tone.

"My name is Madeleine Guérin, and I am come to see you," calmly replied the young girl. The widow passed her hand across her brow, as though striving to collect her thoughts.

"I have been dreaming," she said, abstractedly; "methought I was dying, and going to be buried in the snow."

"It has been snowing," observed Madeleine; "how do you feel now?"

"I am cold," replied the sick woman, with a shiver.

Madeleine immediately set about removing her, with the wretched bed on which she was lying, so that she might receive as much of the heat of the fire as was possible. When she had effected her object in the most gentle manner, she began once more to chafe the widow's limbs. In less than half an hour the poor woman was completely restored, and, though the fearful ravages which disease had made upon her frame were still strongly visible, she seemed now quite sensible. She might be about fifty, but a life of toil and penury made her look at least twenty years older. Care and grief had imprinted their deep wrinkles on her withered countenance, whilst her wasted cheek and sunken eye told of long and lingering illness. She looked attentively at Madeleine, as

though striving to recollect her features, and wondering who she might be.

"Have you been long here?" she asked at length.

"Not much more than an hour," replied Madeleine.

"Ah!" said the sick woman, thoughtfully, "I remember it now: for two days I watched the snow as it fell; I knew that I was going away, yet I found it hard to die here alone; but who was to come near me through the snow? At last I fell asleep. Thank God, the snow has ceased!"

"It is snowing still," said Madeleine.

"Then how did you come?" asked the widow, looking on her with astonishment.

"It was not snowing when I left home."

"Well, but why did you come?" almost harshly exclaimed the sick woman; "I do not know you."

"I knew that you were ill," calmly replied Madeleine; "and when I saw that there no longer came any smoke from your chimney I feared you were much worse. Besides," she added, in a melancholy tone, "there are some in this world, doomed to a life of solitude, who can risk more than others; who may take on themselves tasks neglected by the happier ones; I am of these."

"And so you came through the snow to see me, a stranger, whilst all in Mont-Saint-Jean would have let me die here alone," said the widow, in a tone so low and gentle that Madeleine looked up with surprise.

Without making any direct reply, the young girl merely asked her how she felt.

"Better, thank you."

"This is a dreary place," observed Madeleine, looking round her; "when the snow has ceased you must come down the hill with me; I will give you a warm room."

The widow shook her head. "I shall never leave this place alive," said she, sadly, "I am dying."

"Dying!" exclaimed Madeleine, "you said you were better."

"To die is to be better," answered the widow.

Madeleine gazed on her with pitying surprise, for there was a bitterness in the tone of her who spoke thus, which showed that the thought came from despair, and not from resignation. "You have suffered much," said she, sitting down near her, and drying her still wet garments opposite the fire.

"Oh! you may say that," exclaimed the woman, "you may say that. Look at me," said she, throwing back the grizzled and matted locks which shaded her haggard countenance. "I was once the prettiest girl in all Mont-Saint-Jean—every one said so. Well, see me now; and yet I am not old."

"I thought you were from Paris," said Madeleine.

"Yes, they called me the Parisian, because when I came back no one knew me: yet I had not been thirty years away, and I knew all those whom I had left behind me; but they had not suffered like me."

Madeleine gazed on her with silent pity. The widow continued: "It is little more than twenty-five years since I left this place a happy woman, with my husband and my child. We went to Paris, where Mathurin became a water-carrier; 'tis a hard trade for a woman, yet I assisted him, and every one called me still the handsome Jeanne. We worked from morning till night, but we were happy for all that, for we loved one another, and our only wish was to put a little money by and come back with it to Mont-Saint-Jean. Well, we worked so hard, that, after fifteen years, we had saved five thousand francs."

"And did you come back then?" asked Madeleine.

Jeanne smiled bitterly. "The rich are hard of heart," said she; Mathurin had confided our little all to a rich man whose business it was to take care of the money of other people and make it bring in more. One day that man went off to another country, tak-

ing away all that did not belong to him, and our money with the rest. From that time I saw there was something at Mathurin's heart; he said little, and worked as usual, for he knew that if he did not his three children might starve. Our eldest son, who could have assisted us now, had been taken away from us to become a soldier, and only the younger ones remained. But one day he fell down in the street, like a horse when the burden is too heavy for him. When they brought him home I saw in his eye that he could not live; he knew as much himself, for he said to me, 'Jeanne, I shall never see Mont-Saint-Jean again!' and he heaved such a sigh that I knew, for all the doctor could tell me, his heart was broken at that very hour. He never uttered another word, and died the next morning."

"Alas!" sorrowfully said Madeleine, "you have indeed suffered much; your husband's death was doubtless a sad grief to you."

"Yes," said the widow, in a tone of singular bitterness, "I grieved that he had not died six months sooner; for then," continued she, without noticing Madeleine's look of horror, "I should have been a widow, and they could not have taken away from me my son, my first-born child."

"And did they not restore him to you?" asked Madeleine, whose horror was now changed to deep pity.

"Restore him!" echoed Jeanne. "No, it was easy enough to take him away from us, but God alone could now have given him back: he was killed in battle the day before his father's death. The people all said there was a great victory won, and I recollect that on the evening of Mathurin's burial the city was lit up, and there were great rejoicings. God forgive me for it, but when I saw how happy the people looked who passed by, as though a victory were such a glorious thing, I almost wished, in the bitterness of my heart, that they had lost a son like me; where would have been their gaiety then?"

"Nay," gravely said Madeleine, "that was a sinful wish."

"Why, then, did they mock me with their mirth, their fireworks, and their rejoicings?" fiercely exclaimed the widow. "He had not asked to become a soldier; but they took him away from his peaceful and honest calling—to kill him!"

"That is, indeed, a hard law which sends men to death," sadly rejoined Madeleine, "but I have heard that conscripts can be bought off with money."

"Yes," gloomily replied the widow, "the rich can give gold, but the poor must give the flesh and blood of their children."*

There was a fierce energy in the tone of this woman, who had suffered so much, which startled the quiet and thoughtful Madeleine. With a feeling of sad surprise she began to understand the deep wretchedness daily endured by thousands in a large city. She remained awhile wrapped in silent thought, and then observed,—

"What did you do after your husband's death?"

"I worked, ay, the very day he was buried I worked; the poor have no time for idle sorrow."

"And did you succeed in earning a livelihood?"

"Yes, if to be half-starved is to live. Yet God knows there was nothing I did not try to do; but what are a woman's earnings? and I had three children. I was now too weak and broken-down to carry water; no one called me any longer the handsome Jeanne. I stayed at home and did a little needle-work; I washed, I ironed, I did everything that could give us bread, and yet we never had enough. Eight weary years passed away; two of my children died, and I believe in my heart that misery killed them. Though sorely grieved, I thought I might now be more at ease, and earn at least enough for myself and my remaining child; but long toil had

* The new French constitution will no longer allow this iniquitous distinction; rich and poor must alike take the chance of war.

taken all my strength away: I fell ill and could not work, and yet I was hungry. Some poor people who lived in the house were very kind to me, but their kindness was a weight to my soul; for, though the bread they gave me prevented me and my child from starving, I knew that every morsel was taken from the mouths of their own children. A rich lady at length heard of my miserable state, and came to see me, bringing me money and food, so that for some time, at least, starvation was kept away."

"How grateful you must have felt," said Madeleine, whose heart warmed towards the benevolent lady as she spoke.

"Grateful!" harshly exclaimed the widow, "and for what? because she gave me food? Had not my child and I as good a right to eat our daily bread as she had? and had I not earned that bread until then by the sweat of my brow, whilst she lived in luxury and idleness? No, no, Madeleine, I did not feel grateful, and, though she was kind, yet in my heart I hated and I envied her."

Madeleine was struck with dismay at this display of a bad and malignant feeling, of which she could not until then have suspected the existence; she did not know all that misery will produce in the human heart. The widow doubtless read her thoughts on her expressive countenance, for she observed, in a bitter tone,—

"I know what you think; you mean to say, like the rich, that were you to give ever so much to the poor still they would not be satisfied, that they are a thankless race; but I tell you, Madeleine, that it is the rich who are hard-hearted. What do you think that rich, kind lady said to me when I complained of the toil which had withered my youth before my time? She told me that toil was the curse which God had laid upon Adam and his children! I could have laughed to hear her speak so; there she stood before me clothed in rich silks, and with rings on her fingers, one of which could have saved me and mine

from all the misery we had endured. It came to my lips to ask her what toil had been hers during the whole of her idle life; to know whether the curse was only for the poor; whether they alone were descended from Adam; but I thought that if I offended her she would give us nothing, and I was silent."

There was something in this speech, notwithstanding the selfish feelings it displayed and the fierce tone of the widow, which came home to Madeleine's heart with a sense of truth; she looked up to Jeanne and said earnestly,—

"You are right; God never placed us upon this earth that we might starve; there must be something wrong."

"I know it," replied the widow, "yet it was a long time before I found it out; but suffering taught me many things, and that amongst the rest. How often have I sat alone in my garret, faint with fasting, thinking of the rich corn which covered the earth, of the flocks that fed upon the hills, of the sunny fruit that grew in the valleys, until I asked myself why I and my child had not a share of those good things which God had meant for all his creatures. Oh! Madeleine, it stirred bitterness in my heart to think of the malice of man! I have told you many of my sorrows, but the last and deepest I have not told. It was when the rich lady was gone from Paris. I was recovering, and she left me some money, but before it was all spent I tried to work again in order to save it. Would to God I had not done so. I soon grew worse than before; our money only lasted a little while, and we were more wretched than ever,—we were starving! What would you do, Madeleine, if that was your case?" she added, with startling suddenness, and riveting her glassy eyes on the young girl's countenance.

"What would I do?" echoed Madeleine, "I should work, or, if I could not, pray."

"You would not steal?" asked the widow.

"God forbid!" cried Madeleine, aghast at the mere idea; "did you steal, Jeanne?"

"No, but she did."

"Who did?"

"My child, Mathurine—I had her called so for the sake of her father: she was then about nine years old; poor child, one day she felt hungry and took a loaf from a baker's shop; she was caught in the act, and led before a magistrate, who told her how sinful in the poor it was to steal. 'But if you were hungry, sir, would you not wish to eat?' said Mathurine, and a woman who was there told me that the magistrate remained dumb, and could make her no answer. He said the child was too young to be punished, and so she was brought back to me. The baker told me how sorry he felt to have made all this stir, but he did not know the child was really hungry. He was a good man, and, though poor himself, he sent us from that time a loaf every week. Oh, how my heart yearned towards that man!"

"And did Mathurine steal again?" asked Madeleine.

"No," answered the widow, in a tone which made the young girl's heart sink within her, "she died!"

"Oh! it was a hard, a bitter trial," she continued, after a short pause. "I had loved her more than aught else on earth; and, God forgive me for the sin, but when any of my other children died I was glad, with all my sorrow, that it was not she. When everything was over, a doctor came to learn, as he said, the cause of her death; he told me it was consumption, for he could always give names to the illnesses of my children; but I knew that they had been killed by one disease, and that was hunger. For two days I sat by the body of my child, for though I was aware that she was truly dead, I did not wish to believe it. People came in and out of the room, and pitied my sorrow, yet they all agreed that the poor child's death was a relief and a mercy of God. I

heard them and said nothing, but when I looked on the stiff, cold corpse of my Mathurine, and remembered the gay, merry thing she had been, I could not think it a mercy that she was dead. About that time a great lady in the neighbourhood lost her little boy; they said that grief nearly made her mad, and I pitied her. But when I heard those who had told me it was a mercy for Mathurine to be taken away, declare that the lady's misfortune was great, and that the hand of God was heavy upon her, then my heart sickened within me, and I thought I would come home here to die."

"God help thee, poor creature," said Madeleine, with deep pity, "thou hast indeed suffered much."

"I suffered still more when I came back. It broke my heart to see again the place where I had been so happy, and which I had left with my husband, thinking then to return a rich woman with a house and lands of my own, but where I now appeared a poor and lonely wanderer."

These worldly thoughts grated on Madeleine's spirit. "What!" said she, meekly, but in a tone of surprise, "you wished to become rich?"

"And why not?" harshly asked the widow. "Why should I not wish to become rich like every one?"

"You say that the rich are all hard of heart?"

"So they are. But, though I should become hard to the poor like them, is that a reason why I should not seek to enjoy all their comforts? What should I then care for the poor?"

"Nay, this is wrong, very wrong," sorrowfully said Madeleine, "and I know that you think not as you speak."

"You are right, I do not," replied the widow, "but my heart is changed from what it was once. What has the world done for me that I should love it? It has let me live. Why was I starving? Why did I see my children die from hunger, when others had more wealth than they could spend? I once said to a pious man that it seemed to my poor judgment the

world would be better arranged if all human creatures shared in its wealth alike, and there were neither rich nor poor. He told me my wish was a sinful one ; that it was flying in the face of God's will and the order of his providence. I asked him if it was the will of God that I should starve, or in the order of his providence that I should commit some sin in order to be able to live ? He could not answer me. Oh ! Madeleine, think how bad and cruel the world must be when good and pious men will say such things !”

“ Well, but what is to be done ? ” asked Madeleine, sorely puzzled.

“ I know not,” abruptly answered the widow : “ I am a poor, ignorant woman, how should I ? But there are wise men in the land paid to find out everything ; let them find out that.” And, with a smile of unutterable bitterness, she sank back on her pallet, exhausted by the exertions of the last half-hour.

Madeleine pressed her to take some refreshment, but she refused ; she could not eat, she said, and the only beverage she would taste was a little wine diluted with water. This seemed to cool the fever within her, and in a short time she sank into a deep sleep.

Madeleine sat by her bedside wrapped in a thoughtful and melancholy mood. The sick woman's narrative had made a deep impression upon her mind ; it had shown her that, though in villages like Mont-Saint-Jean there might reign a certain equality, that is to say, that all were poor, though some might be poorer than the rest, yet in that other world of which she knew nothing the case was different ; for there lived the luxurious rich and the starving poor side by side and often beneath the same roof. “ Has God then made some of his creatures merely to suffer ? ” sorrowfully thought Madeleine. But she immediately discarded the idea as a blasphemy. “ It cannot be,” she earnestly repeated to herself, “ it cannot be ; God is all goodness ; the fault must be with man ; He will take his own time to alter this, and perhaps inspire one of those wise men of whom Jeanne spoke with the

means of relieving the suffering poor." As she dwelt upon it, this idea strengthened itself in Madeleine's mind; her perfect faith banished the doubt which, for the first time perhaps, had entered there. The cloud passed away from her spirit, and, in her renewed confidence, she wondered how she could have mistrusted the power and goodness of God.

CHAPTER V

THE next day found the widow much more composed and also much weaker. The snow had ceased, but the weather was still cloudy and overcast, and the sick woman complained of cold, though her bed lay near the fire, which Madeleine supplied plentifully from the faggots sent by the curate. Jeanne looked upon her with a grateful glance, and often urged her to take some food, or at all events to rest awhile; for whenever she had chanced to wake in the night she had seen Madeleine sitting by her bedside, watching her troubled slumbers and telling her rosary.

Madeleine, who was somewhat surprised at the change in her tone and manners, felt still more astonished when the sick woman observed, in a low and subdued voice,

"Madeleine, you must forgive me all the mad and sinful things which I said yesterday; but, God help me, I have suffered much, and at times I have thought I should go mad. You see, Madeleine, there are some who can suffer quietly; who can feel their hearts break within them; ay, who can die, without uttering a word. But I was never of these; I could not bid my grief be silent; and when I was starving, I felt that life was still too strong within me to be given up without a murmur. It was only when my sorrow was too great for utterance that I did not complain; and then people thought me resigned. Yesterday I dare say I said that which was wrong; and yet who can tell? To-day at least I have a more Christian feeling, and I can forgive the rich."

This woman talked so boldly of forgiveness and of her wrongs, that Madeleine began to think she might be justified in doing so; that she might have the right of forgiving those who had let her and her children die

of want; and that they had wronged her, though perchance they knew not of her existence: still she was glad to mark her altered frame of mind, and she said so.

The widow smiled sadly: "Why you see, Madeleine," said she, "it behoves the dying to forgive everything."

"Dying!" exclaimed Madeleine; "nay, Jeanne, you look better than yesterday."

"Yes; but my pulse is low, and I can scarcely feel the beating of my heart. Madeleine, I have learned to know the signs of death from those I most loved on earth."

Madeleine said nothing; but as she marked the sharp, pinched features of the sick woman, her thin lips, cold glassy eyes, and low, altered voice, she could not help thinking that she had said the truth, and was indeed drawing near her last hour.

"Madeleine," said Jeanne, after a short silence, "I am not afraid to die, yet I am sad; I know not why. Yesterday you appeared to me like one near whom grief could not come; have you never known sorrow?"

"I have," calmly said Madeleine, "I have known deep sorrows, but God always seemed to make them pass away from my spirit like the dark clouds from heaven."

"But why are you happy?" urged the sick woman.

"Because God is good," answered the young girl.

"Ah! why then did He let my children die?" sorrowfully asked Jeanne.

"You say that this is a sad world; perhaps it was to spare them the grief and misery which are in it."

"But why has God made the world sad?" said the widow, looking wistfully at Madeleine.

"Alas! I know not," answered she, shaking her head doubtfully, for this was a question to which her philosophy suggested no reply.

The sick woman tossed restlessly about upon her couch, and Madeleine seemed lost in deep thought.

"Madeleine," at length said Jeanne, "tell me something that may comfort me, for my heart sinks within me."

"What can I tell you?" gently asked Madeleine.

"Tell me that God is good, though this world is so hard to the poor; and that He loves them though He lets them suffer."

"And do you then doubt the goodness of God? do you think that He forsakes the poor?" sorrowfully asked Madeleine. "Did He not send his Son on earth to suffer with them? and did He not say, 'Blessed are they that weep, for they shall be comforted?'"

"Say that again," eagerly exclaimed Jeanne, "it does my soul good to hear you: say that again." Madeleine did so. "And yet," continued the widow, "why does He let them suffer and weep?"

"Alas! I know not," again sadly replied Madeleine; "I wish I knew, that I might tell you: but oh! Jeanne, whatever you say of the world and the rich, do not, oh! do not doubt the goodness of God."

Madeleine had uttered these words in an earnest and solemn tone: and as she stood by that bed of the dying, with her hands clasped, and her eyes raised to heaven in the intensity of her feeling, discarding those vain and worn-out arguments which prove nothing, but full of trust in that inward voice which never yet deceived the heart of man when he listened to it sincerely, she looked the picture of living faith—of that faith which is strong within its own strength, and turns to heaven without earthly alloy.

"I believe you," said the widow, earnestly, and raising herself on her elbow to look at Madeleine; "you would not say so if you did not think it was true; I believe you." And she sank down once more upon her couch, closing her eyes as though she wished to sleep. Madeleine took a seat near her bed, and fell into a deep fit of musing. A quarter of an hour

had scarcely elapsed, when the sick woman opened her eyes; she had not been asleep, but thinking.

"Madeleine," said she, abruptly, "do you know what makes me believe most in the goodness of God?"

"No," said Madeleine, looking up, "what is it?"

"It is that in all my troubles I found some of his creatures willing to help me. Those people who gave me food when I was ill were very poor: the baker too was poor, and yet he gave me bread; and you, Madeleine, did you not come through the snow that I might not die alone? Ah! if there is still so much goodness in this wicked world, how good must He be!"

Madeleine made no reply; no argument was needed to impress her with the goodness of God; and the widow, whose hands were clasped as though in prayer, did not seem to require an answer; her eyes closed once more, and by her breathing Madeleine soon ascertained that she was now sleeping. The young girl then took her missal, which she had brought with her, and began reading in a low tone the prayers appointed for the sick.

The widow slept for several hours. It was night when she awoke, and there was no other light in the cottage save that afforded by the fire, which still burned brightly on the hearth. When she opened her eyes, and spoke to Madeleine, the young girl perceived that her life was ebbing fast away; for her words came incoherently forth, and her eyes were glazed and dim. She also complained of cold; and, though Madeleine chafed her limbs assiduously, it seemed as though nothing could dispel their icy chillness. The sick woman thanked her by a glance full of gratitude, but she signed her to desist from her useless efforts.

"Do you not feel warmer now?" asked Madeleine.

"I see that you are rubbing my feet, but I do not feel you doing so," answered Jeanne, feebly: "it is

all of no use, Madeleine, my hour is come. What time is it?" she asked, after a pause.

"It has been night for some time, it must be now about six."

"How is the weather?"

"It is snowing again."

"Oh! my God, my God," anxiously muttered Jeanne.

"What is the matter?" gently asked Madeleine.

"Oh! I am thinking that I am going to die. I know that I cannot live beyond this night; and that if this snow lasts you will perhaps be shut up here with my dead body; that would be dreadful, Madeleine."

"There is no fear of the cottage being blocked up," answered Madeleine, "for the wind drives the snow from it."

This assurance comforted Jeanne for a moment, but, with that restlessness peculiar to the sick, she asked the next minute if it were snowing still.

"Yes, but the snow is very thin," answered Madeleine.

"Well, but the road will perhaps be too bad for you to go down," said the widow, "and you will die of cold and hunger up here."

"I have still provisions in my basket for several days, and the people of Mont-Saint-Jean will know that when the smoke ceases something has happened to me."

"Will you not be afraid?"

"Afraid of what?" simply asked Madeleine.

"Of remaining alone with a corpse," sadly answered the widow.

"No, why should I fear? I know that even if you could hurt me you would not."

"You are right, I would not; and when my poor husband and my children died I never felt afraid of them."

"Well, then, I shall not fear you," said Madeleine.

"What is the matter?" she added, as Jeanne, whose glance was fixed upon the wall, seemed to be chasing something away from her bedside with her hands. She made no reply, and Madeleine renewed her question.

"I know not how it is," said the widow, in a faint, low tone, "a while ago I seemed to think it a relief to die, but now I am afraid. Where do we go when we die?"

"To heaven," devoutly said Madeleine, to whose mind the idea of any other place had never perhaps seriously offered itself.

"Oh! heaven must be a long way from earth," exclaimed Jeanne, in a wearied tone, and like one whose heart sinks from the prospect of a long and tedious journey; "but my time is come, and I must go; I should have wished to have confessed my sins to a priest before I died, yet God's will be done. There is not much that lies heavy on my soul since I last received absolution; still I wish the *curé* were here to speak to me, for oh! my soul, it is faint and sick at the thought of death."

"I cannot talk to you like the *curé*," said Madeleine, meekly, "but I have my prayer-book here; will it comfort you if I read something out of it?"

"Yes, yes, do," almost eagerly exclaimed the dying woman, "read me the litanies for the dying; it will do my soul good in this last struggle."

Madeleine knelt at the foot of the bed, and, opening her prayer-book at the litanies, which, according to the Roman ritual, form part of the recommendation of a departing soul, she read them in a slow and solemn tone, whilst the voice of Jeanne faintly uttered the responses.

When the litanies were ended, Madeleine gazed on the face of the sick woman; she saw that her glance was fixed and dim, and that her spirit was nearly departing. She then rose, and in a low, tremulous tone read the following beautiful adjuration: "Go forth, thou Christian soul, out of this world, in the name of

God the Father Almighty, who created thee : in the name of Jesus Christ, the son of the living God, who suffered for thee : in the name of the Holy Ghost, who sanctified thee : in the name of the Angels, Archangels, Thrones, and Dominations, Cherubim and Seraphim : in the name of the Patriarchs and Prophets, of the Holy Apostles and Evangelists, of the Holy Martyrs, Confessors, Monks, and Hermits, of the Holy Virgins, and of all the Saints of God : may thy place be this day in peace, and thy abode in Holy Sion. Through Christ our Lord."

Madeleine paused ; no voice responded Amen ; a strange stillness pervaded the room ; she listened, but all was silent. At last she looked towards the bed ; she was alone ; the spirit had fled, and nought save the mortal clay was there.

For a few seconds Madeleine gazed with silent and involuntary awe on the face of the dead, then she sank on her knees, and prayed fervently for the soul that had left its earthly home. And thus she passed away the night in vigil and prayer, whilst the fire burned dimly on the hearth, and the snow drifted by the cottage window.

CHAPTER VI.

MARIE MICHON'S grief on seeing Madeleine depart, in spite of her entreaties, on her dangerous errand of love, had been in proportion to the affection she bore her. But when she found herself alone other thoughts came to her mind ; she felt afraid, she knew not of what, though the neighbourhood of the old cemetery certainly did not tend to increase her sense of security. Marie was naturally superstitious, and her education had rendered her still more so ; the thought of remaining alone, near the abodes of the dead, filled her with inward terror ; and, as the snow had ceased to fall, she soon resolved on leaving Madeleine's cottage and returning to her parents.

She arrived at their dwelling in safety, and found them much alarmed by her long absence. She soon diverted their feelings of uneasiness or surprise from her own case by relating to them how Madeleine had gone to visit the sick widow, who lived on the summit of the eastern hill.

The news spread rapidly through Mont-Saint-Jean. The astonishment and alarm were universal, for the oldest and most experienced mountaineers declared that it was a miracle if Madeleine escaped, as a snow-storm was coming on the like of which had not been seen for many years. The event showed the truth of this prediction, for in the course of the afternoon, and when it was surmised that Madeleine must still be engaged in her ascent—as was the case—the snow began to fall, and soon become so dense and heavy that the widow's cottage vanished in the mist. It snowed during the whole of the day, and all night long. The greatest anxiety prevailed, in the meantime, concerning Madeleine's fate ; some conjectured that she had been lost in the snow, or had mistaken

her path and fallen into one of the deep ravines known to exist on the slope of the hill; and all agreed that, if she still lived, it could be only through the most manifest intervention of Providence. Marie Michon was in despair, and her faith in the truth of the presentiment which assured her that she should never see her dear Madeleine again became stronger every minute.

The morning was dark and clondy, the snow had ceased, but, though almost all the inhabitants of the village assembled at an early hour around the stone cross which stood opposite the church of Mont-Saint-Jean—this spot being that which commanded the best view of the eastern hill—they could see nothing yet; a thick mist still intervened between them and the cottage which they so anxiously longed to behold. An hour of suspense thus elapsed; at length the wind rose, the mist began to roll slowly away from the valley which lay between Mont-Saint-Jean and the eastern hill; for some time it still floated gracefully around its rocky brow, but suddenly, and as if parted asunder by violence, it opened, disclosing the snow-covered cottage, which rose in faint relief on the white background of the hill.

Marie Michon, who was standing on the highest step of the cross, now bent forward; her strained eyes were eagerly fixed on the cottage for a few seconds, then a cry burst from her lips: "The smoke, the smoke!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands together, and sinking down on her knees in a transport of joy.

A faint blue streak which slowly ascended from the chimney of the cottage was, indeed, visible to every eye. All anxiety was over for the present; the joyful news immediately spread through the village, and M. Bignon, the little *cure*, who had been waiting for the result with trembling anxiety like the rest, hastened in out of the cold to convey the tidings to his old housekeeper. As for Marie Michon, she declared repeatedly that this was her happiest day.

The mist which had thus been dispelled for a moment soon rose again from the valley, and shrouded both the hill and the cottage in its dim recesses; but, as the safety of Madeleine was now ascertained, all anxiety ceased for the time being. The next morning, however, a crowd, though not so numerous as on the preceding day, again assembled on the Place, opposite the church. Marie took her stand at the foot of the cross, where, notwithstanding the intense cold, she eagerly waited until the mists should melt away, and the cottage be seen once more. She was the first to perceive it when the mist slowly rolled away from the brow of the hill; but, though the tall chimney was fully as visible as on the preceding day, no smoke now issued from it. She looked again and again, but in vain; all those around her were equally unfortunate; they saw the chimney, but not even the slightest trace of smoke. Marie's heart sank within her; her presentiment returned with all its force; she felt quite sure that Madeleine must be dead, that she had been frozen with the cold during the night, and her tears flowed fast as she came to this conclusion. But, at the very moment when she declared that such must be the case, she spared no entreaties to induce those around her to make an effort to rescue Madeleine. When she spoke, however, of the practicability of reaching the summit of the eastern hill, the old mountaineers shook their heads doubtfully, though they all agreed "that the girl who had gone up there to relieve a dying Christian should not be allowed to perish without an effort on their part to save her."

"May Heaven bless and reward you!" fervently exclaimed Marie. "Shall I run and fetch you what you want?"

"Thank you," coolly answered one of the men who had offered themselves for this dangerous service; "all that is very well, of course, but you need not be in such a hurry to fetch our things, my good girl, we shall not set out for another hour yet."

"Not for another hour!" exclaimed Marie, in a

tone of dismay. "Oh! blessed Virgin! Madeleine will perhaps be dead by that time."

"Why you see, Marie," calmly observed the man, who, having more experience than his comrades, was to act as guide, "we have all wives and children, and we cannot throw our lives madly away; the sky is getting darker and darker, and before the hour is past the weather will either clear up or there will be another snow-storm, worse than that of the day before yesterday; in the first case there is risk, but it is such as men may brave, and we will go."

"And if the storm does come on?" anxiously asked Marie.

"If the storm does come on," gravely replied the peasant, "the will of God must be done."

"What do you mean to say?" enquired Marie, with a sinking heart.

"I mean to say," answered the mountaineer, "that it is in Heaven Madeleine must put her trust, and not in the help of man."

"But what will you do?" urged the young girl.

"We will stay."

An indignant exclamation rose to Marie's lips, but she repressed it; of what use would it have been? But never had an hour passed so slowly away for her as that which now followed, and never had she watched with such deep attention the state of the weather. For nearly half an hour it remained undecided; at the end of that time, however, the sky became gradually overcast. Marie did not dare to question the men who were smoking near her, but she endeavoured to read the truth on their stolid countenances. The silence they preserved increased her fears; for some time she hardly ventured to look at the church clock, lest she should find the hour which had been appointed nearly elapsed; and when it struck at last, the glance which she cast on the lowering sky was so full of grief that one of the men, taking pity on her distress, observed, "You may make your mind easy, Marie, there will be no storm this morning."

"May God be praised!" she fervently exclaimed, relieved by these few words from all her fears.

The men now lost no time in preparing for their expedition; but, first one thing was forgotten just when all the rest were ready, and then another again, so that, though it only lasted a few minutes, the whole seemed an age to Marie. At length, however, and to her infinite satisfaction, the men were all prepared and ready to start. They had taken leave of their wives and children, and had, cap in hand, offered up a brief prayer in the church; their brandy flasks were firmly fixed in their leathern belts, and they each held that long staff, the indispensable companion of the mountaineer. But, as the foremost man was taking the steep path which led to the eastern hill, Marie suddenly arrested him by laying her hand upon his arm, and observing, in a low tone, "Jean, what black speck is that which is moving down the hill?"

The man followed the direction of her eye and, after a brief pause, exclaimed, "It is a human being!"

Every glance was now riveted on the black speck, which moved so slowly that many averred it was stationary. Jean and Marie, however, kept to their opinion, which was confirmed by M. Bignon, the parish priest, who, after looking through his pocket telescope, declared that it was a woman, and that she was coming down the hill.

"Is it Madeleine, sir?" eagerly asked Marie.

"I cannot see her features, but she wears a gray cloak."

"Then it is her," exclaimed Marie, joyfully. But as she looked at the mountaineers near her, and marked the ominous glances which they exchanged, she anxiously asked if there was any danger for Madeleine.

"There is, and great danger," gravely answered Jean, "danger which we cannot prevent, for long before we could reach the peak where she is now Madeleine will either be amongst us in safety, or

everything will be over." And, taking the telescope from the hands of the priest, the man looked through it, shook his head, and passed it to his neighbour. After looking like the rest and distinctly recognising Madeleine, Marie, who felt as though it would choke her to utter a word, sat down on the stone step of the cross, and anxiously watched the slow progress of her friend. A quarter of an hour had thus elapsed when the form of Madeleine was suddenly concealed from the view of all those on the place by a small wood of pines which clothed the foot of the hill. The men looked at one another.

"Ay," said Jean, with a clouded brow, "now is the time for Madeleine to have a steady step and a cool head."

"Why so?" asked Marie, though she understood their meaning but too well.

"Why! know you not that when she leaves the wood she has to cross the Black Hole, over a bridge of rock not much more than a foot wide, and covered with snow besides? I say it again, now is the time for her to have a steady step and a cool head."

Marie buried her face in her hands.

"If she crosses it safely," continued Jean, "and though it is narrow it is not long, the rest will be mere child's play to her, for, by the way in which she came down the hill, she does not seem one to be frightened by a stumble or a false step."

"How long do you think it will take her to be here?" asked Marie, looking up.

"About half an hour," he answered, after a moment's pause; "for you see, though the way she took is a dangerous one, it is also short; and if she is not here by that time, you may conclude that all is not right."

Marie looked at the church clock; it wanted twenty minutes to twelve. Though the hand moved slowly along, she could not keep her eyes off it; at last the hour struck; ten minutes more and Madeleine's fate would be known. The ten minutes passed away, yet

no human form appeared along the steep path which led from the eastern hill to the village. The poor girl's heart sank within her; and in every countenance she read the confirmation of her fears. The *curé*, who was pale with anxiety, now approached Jean, and observed, "I am afraid, Jean, something has happened to this poor child."

"I fear so, too, Monsieur le Curé; but indeed it was a rash thing for her to attempt to cross the Black Hole over a rock covered with snow."

"What can be done?" asked M. Bignon.

"Nothing, sir; but we can, if you like, go and see what has become of her; man can do no more."

"Perhaps," here interposed Marie, in a tremulous tone, "Madeleine has only taken another path, and has no intention of coming hither now?"

"Nay," said Jean, shaking his head in token of dissent, "this cannot be. Knowest thou not, Marie, that the snow has blocked up all the paths leading from the eastern hill save this one, and this she must have seen as soon as she left the wood? No, no, Madeleine was on her way hither, and something, I fear, must have happened to her; at all events we will go and see."

"I will go with you," said Marie, rising.

Every one present remonstrated with her; for even this expedition was not without danger; but Marie was resolved to go, and heeded not their representations.

"Living or dead, I will see Madeleine once more," she said, in a tone which silenced her advisers.

But scarcely had the little party proceeded a few steps, when Jean's watchful eye detected something moving along the pines which grew in the valley at their feet. Marie, wrapped in melancholy reflection, saw nothing. When Jean, however, tapped her shoulder, and bade her look up, she started, then stopped short, pale and trembling. "It is either Madeleine or her spirit!" she at length exclaimed.

It was indeed Madeleine herself, who, unconscious of the anxiety felt on her account, was slowly coming up the path. On perceiving her the little escort paused; but Marie ran to meet her friend.

"Oh! Madeleine," she cried, clasping her arms round her neck, "how much anxiety you have made us endure!"

"I am indeed sorry for this," replied Madeleine, with a concerned air, as she returned the embrace of her friend; "but when the snow ceased I thought it best to come."

When Madeleine reached the place, the satisfaction became universal. On understanding the uneasiness which had been felt on her account, and the efforts on the point of being made in order to rescue her from her supposed danger, she warmly thanked those who had volunteered to come to her assistance, and was evidently moved by the general sympathy manifested for her. But when the priest, seeing how wet her clothes were with the snow, wanted her to enter his house, where Dame Ursula would provide her with a change of raiment,

"If you please, sir," calmly answered Madeleine, "I shall first go into the church and return thanks to God for my preservation."

In a few minutes Madeleine's devotions were over, and she entered the house of the *curé*, where everything that could tend to her comfort was devised. When M. Bignon, however, after hearing the account of her adventures, praised her heroism, Madeleine seemed surprised, and observed, with her usual simplicity, "Nay, sir, I was the poor woman's nearest neighbour; was it not then my duty to go and see her?"

CHAPTER VII.

ON the evening of the day on which Madeleine had returned to Mont-Saint-Jean, the snow fell so heavily that those who had accused her of rashness now confessed she had acted prudently in leaving the cottage. It continued to snow for a week, until the end of which time it was impossible to go to the eastern hill in order to give the widow's remains decent burial. Even then this was not effected without considerable difficulty. The interment of the poor woman, whom almost every one had neglected so long as she lived, attracted a large number of persons. The chief source of interest, however, was the presence of Madeleine, who seemed unconscious not only of this fact, but even that she had done anything worthy of admiration.

"For," as she always observed when addressed on this subject, "was she not the widow's nearest neighbour?"

There are few virtues so much admired by uninformed minds as courage. The disregard of danger manifested by Madeleine in undertaking her expedition, and the coolness which had enabled her to bring it to an end in safety, were therefore more valued in Mont-Saint-Jean than the noble motive of Christian charity which had led her to the widow's cottage. Hitherto she had only been the solitary girl who lived near the churchyard, or poor Madeleine whom Maurice had left for Rosette Besson; but now she became the brave Madeleine who had gone up to the eastern hill in the snow-storm. If she had been inclined to act the part of a village heroine, Madeleine certainly possessed an excellent opportunity of doing so. Nothing, however, was further removed from her

thoughts. She remained the same simple, retiring maiden she had ever been; and, as she sought not to keep up her reputation for bravery by any feat of daring, the matter soon ceased to be the theme of wonder and admiration.

Madeleine, however, did not so soon forget all that had passed between her and the widow, whose history had made a deep impression upon her mind, by showing her how much misery and suffering reigned in the world. The more she reflected on the subject, the more she felt confirmed in a resolve which she had taken since her parting with Maurice, but which was as yet known to herself alone.

"I never knew all this before," she inwardly thought; "then may there not be misery in Mont-Saint-Jean of which I am unaware? and, even if there is, can I change this?"

But, though Madeleine knew that she was herself only a poor peasant girl, that her power was limited, she also felt that every individual, however humble, can aid others more humble still.

Living, as she did, alone, Madeleine had leisure to think. She was of a speculative, though not of an inquiring disposition; if she did not seek to extend her information, it was because she could have no definite object in doing so. Madeleine was ignorant, and those only who have made some progress in knowledge can value it for its own sake, and feel that it is always useful. But, notwithstanding those disadvantages, there was a characteristic in her mind which could not have failed to strike any one in the least given to metaphysical observation: it was, that whenever a fact offered itself to her as sufficiently remarkable to be remembered, she never dismissed it from her thoughts until she had examined it in all its bearings, and this she did with a tenacity and acuteness which might well have excited admiration in persons greatly her superiors in knowledge.

In the present case the fact which struck Madeleine was, that the poor suffered in a manner which

could never have been intended by their beneficent Creator, and that they had a right to relief. She remembered that the widow had forgiven the rich on her deathbed, and, on comparing this fact with her sad history, she could not help coming to the conclusion that when a human being dies of want or misery, the whole community are to blame, and ought in reality to be held answerable for that being's death. But, granting this to be the case, what was she to do? Could she alter a state of things which had been enduring for ages, and would probably endure for ages still? She could not, but she might at least do her share, and an inward voice told Madeleine that if every one adopted this principle, the whole world would soon be right. Her first step was to ascertain the exact amount of poverty which prevailed in Mont-Saint-Jean. This she did in her own quiet and silent manner; and, though people wondered why she now came so often to the village, visiting the poorest cottages in preference to the more comfortable dwellings, none suspected her real motives. Madeleine already knew that there were many poor families in her native place, but she had not been prepared for the extent of the wretchedness which she now witnessed. Her first impulse was to relieve the poverty of the miserable sufferers, by giving them money and food; but, though this plan succeeded in some cases, it failed in many others. The money was often squandered away in an improvident manner, and the food so soon consumed that Madeleine wondered whether she had really done any good by her charity. She soon perceived, indeed, that the poor are too frequently their own enemies; but with a truly Christian spirit she attributed this to their condition. She did not, like so many individuals, divide society into two classes—the wise rich and the foolish poor. A little experience taught her that human nature was the same in the aristocrats and the plebeians of Mont-Saint-Jean, though she saw that it is unfortunately the fate of

poverty to bring out the recklessness and improvidence which increase its evils.

But, though Madeleine always came to the conclusion that the poor, such as they are, have a right to relief, or, to speak more plainly, that the mere act of living gives us all an equal right to live, she often asked herself, when she saw how soon her means of administering this relief would be exhausted, whether she had adopted the best method of effecting her object. The thought was one well worthy of consideration, and henceforth it became uppermost in Madeleine's mind.

Amongst the individuals whom she assisted in the village was a poor, old, blind woman, whom her infirmities rendered wholly dependent on the aid of others. Madeleine, pitying her sad condition, was never weary of giving her food, and made it a rule not to come to Mont-Saint-Jean without paying her a visit. But, though she supplied almost all her wants, the old woman never seemed satisfied; and Madeleine learned with some surprise that she received from various quarters almost as much as she gave her: that, consequently, she had more than enough. The fact, however, admitted of an easy explanation. Mother Pierre's blindness made her waste much that was useful; then it would happen that perhaps on the very same day when Madeleine had been giving her some soup, Dame Ursula brought her a dishful, whilst the next day she got nothing; thus she often had too much, and often not enough. Madeleine soon understood this, and she saw that, much as was given to her, Mother Pierre might frequently be in want. In order to remedy this evil, she resolved to take the old woman home with her. When she proposed this to her, Mother Pierre accepted it joyfully, for the nature of her infirmity rendered a solitary life doubly irksome to her. One evening she accordingly went home with Madeleine, to the great surprise of the villagers, who wondered what she could possibly want with her.

Madeleine spared nothing to render her guest comfortable; she gave her up the best bed, and attended to all her wants with the tender care of a devoted daughter. Though neither Madeleine's expenses nor her trouble were lessened by this arrangement, she was satisfied with it, for she felt conscious that she had thus relieved the community from the burden of supporting Mother Pierre. She knew, also, that the individuals who had formerly aided the old woman could not give her anything without feeling the want of it in some way or other; by taking the sole charge of her upon herself, she had thus evidently rendered them a service. Her new task was not, however, without unpleasantness. Mother Pierre, though at first delighted with the change in her condition, soon grew accustomed to its comforts, and began to lament living in this solitary spot, far from all her friends and acquaintances; she declared that this life was intolerable, and insisted on leaving Madeleine, to return to her old place of abode. It was in vain the young girl remonstrated, Mother Pierre would have her way, and Madeleine at length gave a reluctant consent; but Mother Pierre now took another humour—she would not go: in short, Madeleine perceived that the old woman only wanted to grumble at something.

Mother Pierre had not long been in her house when Madeleine, in her visits to Mont-Saint-Jean, noticed the wretched condition of a poor old woman named Catherine, who, after a life of toil and industry, was now reduced to the deepest misery. Though Madeleine assisted her as much as lay in her power, she could only alleviate her distress without removing it.

"Ah! Mother Pierre must be very happy with you," one day said Catherine to her; "you are so kind and good."

Madeleine could not resist this indirect appeal. "Would you like to come and live with me also?" said she, sitting down near the old woman.

Catherine looked up wistfully into her face, then

incredulously shook her head, and observed,—“I will not say you do not mean it, Madeleine; for you are too good to mock a poor old thing like me. But how could this be? You have already Mother Pierre to support; and we all know that you have only your earnings to do it with. The burden would be too great for you.”

“Do not think of that,” earnestly replied Madeleine; “for though, as you say, I have nothing but my own gains on which to rely, I have found them more than enough hitherto. Let not this, therefore, prevent you from coming.”

Catherine, however, continued to raise numerous objections, but Madeleine overruled them all; and the poor creature, whose heart secretly inclined towards the proposal, ended by giving her consent to it.

Madeleine had feared that her guests might not agree together; but it fortunately happened that they were old friends, and thus the utmost harmony prevailed between them. Upon the whole, Catherine gave her benefactress no reason to repent of her kindness. She was of the greatest use in attending on Mother Pierre, who was very infirm; she helped Madeleine to clean the cottage and cook the victuals; and she even insisted on mending up the linen and old clothes. In this latter task her failing sight made her commit many mistakes, which Madeleine, who saw how bent she was on rendering herself useful, feigned not to notice, lest she should grieve her. At night, however, she secretly undid the work in which Catherine took so much pride. The old woman, whom she thought asleep, once perceived her thus engaged, and, understanding at once Madeleine's motive, withdrew unnoticed; but from that time forward she gave up needlework. Madeleine had thought, when she received old Catherine into her house, that her expenses would be increased in proportion to the numbers of her family; that is to say, that where she formerly spent one franc she should now spend three. But, to her surprise, she found that when she was

alone it cost her almost half of what it did now; thus, that three persons could be kept for double the sum which would be expended for one alone. When this fact presented itself to Madeleine's mind, she could not help exclaiming inwardly, "What a pity the poor people will not all live together, and thus be comfortable, instead of remaining miserable and alone!"

Then Madeleine asked herself if this was impossible; but, though she reflected much on the plan, she could not see how it was to be rendered practicable.

About two months after she had taken in Catherine, and when the weather was still very cold, Madeleine was leaving her cottage one morning for the village, when she perceived sitting on the stone steps an old man whom she recognised as old Michel, an inhabitant of one of the neighbouring parishes, who occasionally came to Mont-Saint-Jean to beg; for, not being a native of these parts, he had no relatives to assist him.

"Why do you sit here in the cold, Michel?" gently asked Madeleine.

The old man, who had long been in a state of second childhood, looked up into her face, and muttered some unintelligible reply.

"Come in," said Madeleine, assisting him to rise, and leading him in.

Michel entered the cottage with great alacrity. He immediately sat down near the fire, and eat the bread and meat which Madeleine laid before him with evident relish.

"What brought you so far out of your usual rounds on this cold day, Michel?" asked Madeleine, when the old man had done eating.

"I am come to live with you," he quietly replied.

"To live with me!" echoed Madeleine, much astonished.

"Yes," continued Michel; "they say in our place

that you are taking all the old people in to live with you, and so I thought I would come too."

Madeleine was greatly embarrassed; she knew not how to tell the old man that she could not receive him. She at length did so in the most gentle manner, giving him to understand that her cottage was not large enough for four persons to live in it. But Michel was too childish to feel the force of her reasoning, and, looking up wistfully into her face, he merely said, "I will not take up much room, Madeleine."

Madeleine turned away that he might not see the tears which rose to her eyes. She was wavering in her purpose; but Mother Pierre and Catherine, who were both present, now interfered, and, as they by no means liked the prospect of having Michel for a fellow-guest, they omitted no argument likely to produce an effect upon Madeleine. She yielded to their prudential motives, which agreed with her own judgment, and gently though firmly told Michel she could not keep him, and that he must go with her to Mont-Saint-Jean, whither she was proceeding now. The old man had heeded nothing of what either Mother Pierre or Catherine said, but kept his eyes fixed on Madeleine all the time. When he heard her decision he looked distressed, but prepared to follow her according to her request, with the passive obedience of a child. It was not without a sorrowful heart that Madeleine parted from him when they reached Mont-Saint-Jean; she placed a silver coin in his hand, and told him to apply to her whenever he was in distress; but he seemed to care little for this. What he wanted, he said, was to live with Madeleine. The unerring instinct which leads the weak and infirm to recognise those who will treat them kindly, had drawn him towards the young girl, and made him cling with strange persistency to the idea of residing with her.

A feeling like remorse filled Madeleine's mind as she went home alone: and yet what could she have

done?—her cottage was so small. But though she reasoned thus she could think of nothing but Michel, and of the sorrowful look he gave her when they parted, and she again told him he must go back to his own village. Two days elapsed, during which nothing was heard of Michel, but on the third day after his visit, the first object which Madeleine saw on opening the window of the front room was the old man sitting on the door-step in the same attitude as on the former occasion.

“Do not scold me, Madeleine,” he beseechingly observed when she opened the door; “I tried to stay away, but I could not; do not bid me go.”

“Bid thee go, poor creature!” exclaimed Madeleine, her eyes filling with tears as she spoke, “Heaven forbid; God sent thee hither, and He will surely enable me to provide for thee.”

“You need not mind about a bed,” hurriedly observed Michel, as though he feared some objection, “I have brought my blanket with me; it is a very warm one,” he added, as he produced a thin worn-out article, which might, from its aspect, have been as old as Michel himself.

“Come in,” said Madeleine, with a smile, “henceforth this is thy home.”

The old man entered as though it were the most natural thing in the world. He sat down to breakfast with Madeleine and the old women, who were anything but pleased at his appearance, and the same night he took possession of Madeleine’s bed, whilst she slept on a chair as a matter of course. Having gained his point, he relapsed into his usual state of childishness, the act of providing himself with the blanket being the last proof of forethought which he gave. Although Mother Pierre and Catherine held from Madeleine’s bounty all the comforts which they enjoyed, the selfish spirit engendered by long struggling with the world made them repine at seeing those enjoyments shared by another individual, whose claim to them was as well founded as their own.

Catherine, who instinctively felt that this was not right, and not likely to please Madeleine, for whom she entertained a sincere affection, strove to conceal her feelings on the subject, but Mother Pierre was loud in her complaints; any one might have thought on hearing her that she had undergone some real wrong. Seeing, however, that all her murmurs did not induce Madeleine to turn the old man out of doors, she at length desisted, sullenly foretelling that Michel would give his hostess infinite trouble, and that the additional cost his presence entailed, would cause her to break up her establishment.

The first prediction was soon verified, for Michel, who was too childish to be reasoned with, always got into some new scrape, from which he had to be extricated by Madeleine. His chief propensity was to roam over the country, no matter in what weather, and without any object. Madeleine vainly tried to keep him in; he slipped out at the first opportunity, and often wandered to a distance of several leagues. On those occasions he was either brought back to Madeleine's dwelling by some child who knew that he would be rewarded with a handful of nuts for his trouble, or Madeleine had to go and search for the truant herself. He always promised never to offend again, but his promise was forgotten as soon as made. It was in vain the two old women scolded and railed at him; foolish as he was, he had an instinctive consciousness that they possessed no real power over him, and he never heeded all their talking, whilst one word from Madeleine was enough to make him weep.

Though she lost a good deal of time with the old man, and though her expenses were necessarily increased by his presence, Madeleine could still, according to a homely phrase, make the two ends meet, and this circumstance strengthened the growing faith in Providence which was within her. Three helpless beings were now dependent on her exertions, and she had been able hitherto to supply their wants with every necessary comfort. It was true that since she

had given up her bed to the old man, she had been obliged to sleep either on the floor or on a chair, but her own convenience was the least consideration which offered itself to her mind.

Had she been one to remain satisfied with doing her duty, Madeleine might now have stopped in her work, for she had certainly done more than enough. But she could not pause merely because she had performed her share of the task; she aimed at general utility, and she knew there was still much to be effected in Mont-Saint-Jean. But how was she to remedy this, or what was she to do? For many nights, instead of sleeping, she sat upon her chair watching the fire and revolving this subject in her mind, "What was to be done for Mont-Saint-Jean?"

Though they knew not the nature of the thoughts which rendered her so silent and abstracted, the old women and Marie Michon, who continued to visit her friend, now noticed a marked change in Madeleine's demeanour. After some time, however, this passed away, and she resumed without any apparent cause the cheerful composure which was habitual to her.

Madeleine had been meditating long and deeply on a subject which to her was one of powerful interest—the fate of the poor. Her experience was brief and limited, but during the last few months she had observed much and attentively. She had visited the poorest and most remote dwellings of the surrounding valleys, and the poverty and wretchedness of their inhabitants had struck her with sorrow and dismay. One fact especially impressed itself on Madeleine's mind. It was that, though misfortunes may have been intended by the Almighty to chasten and purify the human heart, poverty and its attendant evils produce a very different effect. She saw that those who were born and reared in misery looked upon life as on a long struggle, in which those who possessed most strength or cunning had the best

chance of success; hence that intense selfishness which is so often a characteristic of the poor, and which seems indeed a condition of poverty. By poor, Madeleine never understood those who could by working supply the wants of nature; amongst these wild hills they were looked upon as rich, however deficient they might be in worldly wealth. The poor were for Madeleine those unhappy beings—and there were, alas! too many around her—who owned nothing on earth save the wretched hovel in which they dwelt, and who earned a precarious subsistence by assisting their wealthier neighbours in the summer. During the winter they lived, according to their own phrase, on whatever God pleased to send them.

The wretchedness of these unhappy families, the deep ignorance in which they were plunged, the recklessness and apathy of the parents, the hunger and nakedness of the children—all these filled Madeleine's heart with deep pity. She was chiefly struck, however, with the increase of misery brought on by disease when it happened to light on any member of the family, and it was perhaps owing to this feeling that she mostly visited and relieved the individuals thus afflicted in preference to others equally wretched. Madeleine seemed, indeed, to feel a strange and deep interest in the fate of all the sick of Mont-Saint-Jean; if they were poor, she relieved them; but even when they needed not her assistance she always managed so as to be near them, rendering them all the little services in her power, and studying with marked attention the symptoms of their various diseases. This conduct excited much surprise and speculation in Mont-Saint-Jean, where she now became a frequent visitor, and whenever her gray cloak was seen some villager failed not to remark, "There goes Madeleine to see some sick person, I'll be bound. What can make the girl so fond of the sick?"

Vulgar minds seldom admit of actions being done

merely for the sake of principle. When Madeleine had gone up to the eastern hill the people of Mont-Saint-Jean had chiefly admired her courage; when she received into her house the two old women and Michel, they wondered what she meant to do with them; and in her present persevering attention to the sick they only saw a whim which would soon pass away. But Marie, either because her friendship for Madeleine led her to put a different construction on her actions, or because she knew her better than those who judged her thus, never failed to observe, when addressed on the subject, "Nay, depend upon it, Madeleine has a motive for what she does, though what that motive is Heaven alone knows."

Whatever it was, Madeleine seemed in no hurry to reveal it; though many broad hints were dropped in her presence, she never answered them, but silently persevered in the mode of conduct she had adopted.

Notwithstanding the severity of the winter, which was unusually cold and tedious, Madeleine continued to visit and relieve, as much as her slender means allowed, the neighbouring sick and poor. There did not exist in the whole vicinity a snowy peak on which arose some solitary dwelling which the once retiring and quiet peasant girl had not visited ere the winter was over, bringing comfort and consolation with her gentle presence. To use the language of the inhabitants of Mont-Saint-Jean, "Her gray cloak was to be seen wherever there was sorrow or suffering,"—in the depths of the silent valleys or on the steep heights of the ancient hills.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN spring came on, Madeleine, without relaxing in her labours, seemed to change their aim. She went out less and worked more; and, such was her assiduity at her wheel, that both the old people and Marie Michon conjectured this increase of industry must be intended to further some definite object, though what that was they were unable to guess. Marie's first impression led her to believe that Madeleine meant to augment her expenses by taking some other helpless being under her care: but the smallness of her cottage, which rendered this literally impossible, soon banished the idea from her mind. She wished to question Madeleine on the subject, without daring to do so; for the calm reserve of the young girl, though strongly tempered with kindness, had inspired Marie with a sort of awe for her friend: so unlike did it render her to all those whom she had ever known.

In the meantime, Madeleine kept her own counsel, and performed whatever she had to do in her habitually quiet and silent manner. On a fine morning, in the month of April, she suddenly announced to Catherine that she was going to Mont-Saint-Jean to see M. Bignon, the parish priest; and that neither she nor Mother Pierre need wait for her return, in order to take their noontide meal. Old Michel had been gone since the morning on one of his rambling expeditions.

"To Mont-Saint-Jean, and to see the *curé*!" echoed Catherine, hoping thus to elicit something more.

"Yes, I want to speak to him," calmly answered Madeleine.

"To speak to him!" repeated Catherine.

But this time Madeleine made no reply, and merely busied herself in preparations for her departure. When these were concluded she bade Catherine farewell, and took the path leading to Mont-Saint-Jean. She had not been long away when Marie Michon came in. Catherine immediately communicated to her the important fact that Madeleine was gone to see the priest. Marie heard her with surprise, though in silence; every action of Madeleine, however trifling in itself, assumed significance in her eyes; and, as she went homewards, she could not help musing on this fact, connecting it with several other circumstances which had come to her knowledge.

Though the result of her conjectures was not far from the truth, it is unnecessary to mention it here; and, even before giving an account of Madeleine's interview with the *cure*, it will perhaps be expedient to introduce the latter personage more fully to the reader's notice.

To begin with his person: Monsieur Bignon was a hale, rosy-faced, good-humoured-looking, little man, on the verge of fifty; his countenance was, however, less indicative of the higher order of intellect than of natural kindliness of heart; and, indeed, a more truly contented, happy, and withal humble being, could with difficulty have been found. Still M. Bignon was not properly to be considered as the beau ideal of a parish priest. He was kind and indulgent to his parishioners, and seldom got vexed with them, though they gave him cause enough; but, to say the truth, the good, easy man did not like the trouble of being angry: he averred, besides, that it did little good; and perhaps he was right upon the whole.

The days of the *cure* of Mont-Saint-Jean were spent in uniform regularity; but, far from disliking the monotony of his existence, he would have felt unhappy if it had been disturbed. When he had

said mass, as he invariably did every morning to a few old women, who were his sole congregation, the priest retired to the solitude of a very small room, which, as it contained about a dozen books, bore the dignified name of his study. Here M. Bignon busied himself until dinner-time in penning a long and laborious refutation of all the atheistical, deistical, and anti-christian propositions contained in Voltaire's works. The worthy man had begun this task, which had now been in hand for upwards of twenty-five years, with the vague idea that it would be finished some day; but it was still in its infancy. Though nothing could be more uncongenial to his quiet, easy spirit than a controversial work, M. Bignon, having in an unlucky hour acquired the conviction that his character demanded it from him, submitted to this painful necessity with the most heroic patience.

After dinner the *curé*, being now released from his morning drudgery, toiled at his garden with a heartiness and good-will pleasant to witness, so well did they show how fitted he was for the task. When this was over he put on his cassock, took his breviary under his arm, and sauntered about the village, addressing every one he met with his usual cordial good-humour, and occasionally entering one of the cottages on his way, where his gentle manners, easy temper, and simplicity of heart, ever rendered him a welcome visitor. When his evening round was over, M. Bignon returned to the Presbytery through the fields, supped quietly with his housekeeper Dame Ursula, and retired for the night with as contented a heart and peaceful a conscience as man need wish to possess.

Occasionally, however, though not very often, the good priest grew uneasy, and imagined that all was not or could not be right, that he was remiss in the duties of his sacred calling, and ought to do more than he did. Whenever his mind happened to be oppressed by these ideas, he fell into fits of melancholy, during which, as Dame Ursula asserted, he

would mope about for a whole evening at a time. Then, for a day or two, perhaps, he would be exceedingly zealous in the performance of what he conceived to be his duties; he either sat in the kitchen with Dame Ursula, and read to her long extracts from his Refutation of Voltaire, by which, of course, she was wonderfully edified; or he spent the whole day in visiting his parishioners, in order to ascertain that all his little flock were in good spiritual health. As M. Bignon was wonderfully strict and rigorous during those visits, insisting on every member of each family being able to repeat the whole Catechism, they were not by any means so much liked as his evening calls, when he only laughed and joked with the merriest.

To give the good man his due, those fits of zeal were of very short duration. He soon discovered that Ursula's cookery was never so good when he had been reading to her, and that, whenever he drew the Catechism from his pocket on one of his pastoral visits, the members of the family one by one managed to drop off, until he was left alone with some old and half-deaf grandam. What could M. Bignon do but become once more the same easy, good-natured man that he was before?

But all this time we have said nothing of M. Morel, M. Bignon's bosom friend, and the priest of the neighbouring parish of Puysaye. A greater contrast than that which existed between the two clergymen, notwithstanding their friendship, could with difficulty have been found. They had been brought up together in a remote village of Auvergne; their youth had been spent in the same seminary; and they had been ordained on the same day. Since then they had each resided in their humble parish, both declining every offer of advancement lest it should separate them. Never was there friendship more firm and lasting, and yet to all appearance so little justified; for, as their respective parishioners observed, they differed from one another as night does

from day. M. Morel was a tall, thin, grave-looking man; his mind seemed a singular compound of kindness and severity; he rebuked more than he praised, but he assisted and relieved oftener than he did either. Many feared him, and called him stern; those who knew him better asserted that there did not live a kinder heart; such a zealous and indefatigable pastor had, indeed, never been seen among the hills of Auvergne. M. Morel's chief characteristic was an ardent wish for improving and bettering the condition of the peasantry; he promoted education in every possible manner, he gave the best of advice on almost every subject to the heads of families, and showed, on every occasion, that nothing lay so near his heart as their happiness. Yet, with all his excellent qualities, the *cure* of Puysaye was less beloved than easy M. Bignon. He possessed more power, and he was perhaps more respected, but he had not the art of conciliating men, and his wisest counsels were always received with a certain degree of that distrust which generally characterises the ignorant poor. This difference of disposition was perhaps the cause of the friendship which existed between the two priests. M. Morel rather liked to domineer, and M. Bignon was just the person to be domineered over and know nothing about it; indeed he rather fancied that he was of a tyrannical disposition, and, in the humility and simplicity of his heart, often exclaimed aloud, "that his brother Morel must have a truly Christian spirit to bear so meekly with his infirmities."

Such an observation, when made in her presence, never failed to irritate highly Dame Ursula. "But, sir," she would remark, in an impatient tone, "do not you see that you yield to him in everything? No wonder he bears with you! I am sure a saint could not be more meek and patient than you are; and M. Morel, who is no saint I suppose——"

"Hold your tongue, Ursula!" M. Bignon would here sternly observe, for he never allowed a word to

be uttered in disparagement of his friend: "you understand nothing of these matters."

"Well, sir," sharply replied Ursula, speaking in a tone of defiance, "if I understand nothing of these matters, I should like to know what Mdle. Antoinette [M. Morel's housekeeper] can know about them! And yet, to hear her talk, one would think her master was the only *curé* in France. It seems, however, to my poor judgment, that you are as good as any one else."

"Ursula, Ursula!" reproachfully said M. Bignon, "how often must I tell you that we were not put upon this earth to quarrel with our brethren, but, on the contrary, to be full of peace and charity towards them! Do I not preach a sermon to this effect every Sunday? But of what use can it be if you do not act upon it? Will not all the parishioners say, 'Ah! what the *curé* tells us is very fine, but, since the *cure's* own housekeeper minds it so little, it cannot be worth much!'"

This was assailing Ursula in a tender point, and M. Bignon, simple as he was, knew it very well. As the *cure's* housekeeper, she conceived herself bound to set every one a good example, and generally answered her master's pathetic appeal by heroically promising to say no more on the subject.

But the truth was that the two housekeepers, for it is almost needless to observe that the real quarrel was between them, were by no means on friendly terms; they had no mutual sympathies. Ursula was a widow, and Antoinette an old maid; they were both of the same age, but each wanted to be the youngest. This was of course a delicate and often-contested point. The former, too, had never left Mont-Saint-Jean, unless to visit the neighbouring villages, whereas Mdle. Antoinette had many years before spent six months in the capital, for which advantage Dame Ursula could never find it in her heart to forgive her. Notwithstanding the friendship of their masters, they

seldom met, but, when such an event happened, were always exceedingly polite and formal; they also never failed to pay one another certain state visits during the course of the year. That this seeming of amity existed between the two belligerent powers was solely attributable to M. Bignon's efforts; for, either owing to Antoinette's superior breeding, or to his own abstraction, M. Morel appeared to know nothing of the covert feud. Even if he was aware of it, he at least forbore to interfere, and trusted entirely to his friend's diplomacy in order to make matters go on smoothly.

Having given some idea of the *curé* of Mont-Saint-Jean, we will now proceed to relate the particulars of the interview which Madeleine had with him on the morning, when, as we have already mentioned, she left her cottage for that purpose.

When Dame Ursula, after having announced her visit, introduced Madeleine into M. Bignon's study, the young girl discovered that the priest Puyssaye was with his friend. M. Morel, however, merely glanced towards her as she entered, and continued writing, an occupation in which he had been engaged during the whole morning.

"Is it anything private you have to say to me, child?" asked M. Bignon of Madeleine when she was seated.

"It is nothing, sir, that I cannot say now."

"Very well, then, speak; M. Morel will not mind you, so you need not be afraid of him. What do you want with me?"

"I want you, sir, if you will be so kind, to persuade Farmer Nicolas to give me the house he has now to let. I dearly wish to take it, but I cannot give him more than a hundred and seventy francs a-year. Perhaps if you would speak to him, sir, he would relent, and let me have it for the money; for he is rich, and can afford it."

"But what do you want with that large house,

Madeleine? are you going to get married?" asked M. Bignon, with a jocular wink, for to say the truth he delighted in weddings.

"No, sir," answered Madeleine, calmly, though there was sadness in her tone; "I shall never marry. If I want Farmer Nicolas's house," she added, after a brief pause, "it is because mine is growing too small."

"Too small! why, who is in it?"

"Old Mother Pierre, Catherine, and Michel, sir."

"And what has brought them there?" asked the priest, opening his eyes very wide.

"I took in Mother Pierre in the beginning of the winter, when, as you may remember, sir, she became blind and could work no longer. Then, as I saw that my gains increased, and that my garden had brought in more that year than usual, I told Catherine to come also, for it did not make much difference. Old Michel was rather more inconvenient, for when he came Mother Pierre and Catherine had to sleep in one bed that he might have the other; yet with God's blessing we have managed it."

"And where do you sleep?" asked the *curé*, much astonished at what he heard.

"On a chair, sometimes, sir, and when it is not too cold, on the floor; but, to say the truth, the house is too small, and I wish for a larger one."

"On the floor!" said the *curé*, in a moved tone. "You are a good girl; but this must not last. Ursula shall send you a mattress to-night."

"Thank you, sir," gladly exclaimed Madeleine, "it will do for old Michel, for he says his is so hard."

"Madeleine," impatiently observed M. Bignon, "we will see about old Michel, but the mattress must be for you, mind that. And now, what about that house? Why do you want it? is it not too large for you?"

"No, sir, I have looked over it, and it will do. It has four very large rooms, and, by contriving, I

could make it hold about seven or eight persons, which is as much as I could support just now."

"Seven or eight persons!" echoed M. Bignon, "and how will you provide for them all?"

"God will provide for them, sir," emphatically replied Madeleine.

M. Bignon was silenced. "Well," said he, after a pause, "I dare say He will, for I verily believe his spirit is with you. You may make your mind easy about Farmer Nicolas's house; I will speak to him, and, if you take a lease of it, I will venture to answer that he will let you have it for the hundred and seventy francs."

"Nay, sir," observed Madeleine, "I cannot take a lease, for Heaven only knows how long I shall remain in it."

"Explain yourself, child," said the *curé*.

"Sir," gravely answered Madeleine, "you know how heavy is at times the wretchedness of our poor mountain people. Nearly all this last year I have been pondering in my mind how it might be relieved. Yet, though this was my thought by night and by day, I could not tell how it was to be done. But once, as I was talking to Marie Michon,—you know her, sir, she lives on this side of the torrent—she told me that when she was ill with the fever in town, her master had her taken to an hospital, where good nuns attended on her until she became well again. When she said this, sir, it seemed as though the words came from heaven, so plainly did I see that what Mont-Saint-Jean wanted was a house where the poor, the sick, and the infirm might ever find a home."

M. Bignon was far too much astonished to speak. Construing his silence into an approbation of her plan, Madeleine continued,—

"I have already thought of the place where this house should stand. I think it will be well on the slope of the hill, for the air there is pure and healthy; yet the building would still be in the middle of the

village, and not far from the church. It is because I think the sooner this house is erected the better, that I do not wish to take a lease of Farmer Nicolas's house; and that was why, sir, I came to you."

We have already said that M. Bignon was a kind man, he was even a good man, but his was not the mind to understand at a glance Madeleine's real character and plan; of the first he knew little, and the second he deemed so extravagant and impracticable, that he ascribed to presumption and overweening confidence in her own resources a trust which only proceeded from the most childlike and implicit faith.

"Madeleine," said he, in a severe and discontented tone, "you are a foolish girl; think no more of this mad plan. Pray who is to help you to erect this magnificent hospital, of which you talk so much at your ease?"

"I know not, sir."

"And yet you speak of it as if it were already built," exclaimed M. Bignon, with increasing displeasure.

"Providence is good, sir."

"Who told you that Providence would help you in this, foolish girl?"

"Yourself, sir," mildly answered Madeleine.

"And pray when did I ever say such a thing?"

"When a few months ago you preached that sermon in which you told us that had we ever so little faith, yet with it we might move even hills away. Oh, sir," she fervently added, "I could not forget those words, they sank so deeply into my heart."

But M. Bignon was not mollified. "So," said he, almost angrily, "you have chosen to apply my words literally. Why not ask for the hill of Saint-Jean to be moved away whilst you are about it?" he added, with what he thought deep irony.

But Madeleine did not understand irony, and this time, at least, she took the priest's words in their literal sense. "Nay, sir," said she, evidently asto-

nished, "why should I ask for Mont-Saint-Jean to be removed from where it stands? God placed it here, and all I desire, with his holy will, is to see a house for the poor arise on it some day."

"Very well," continued M. Bignon, "I see you expect a miracle to be performed in your favour; very well."

"I ask for no miracle, sir," still meekly, but somewhat more firmly, replied Madeleine; "and I trust that for building a house none is needed."

M. Bignon felt rebuked, and his displeasure was not lessened by this, for, though he was naturally humble-minded, he fancied that in this instance he was in the right. "Very well, Madeleine," said he, in a hurt tone, "you are wiser than your old *cure*; go your ways, child, go your ways; Ursula shall send the mattress which I promised, for you have a kind heart, though you are too wilful and confident; but I will have nothing to do with Farmer Nicolas."

Madeleine thanked him quietly for his gift, and turned away to depart. When she stood on the threshold of the room-door a voice called her back; she looked round—it was M. Morel who had spoken. During her conversation with M. Bignon he had continued writing, but now he laid down his pen, and, in a mild though authoritative tone, observed, "Stay, Madeleine, I want to speak to you."

Madeleine paused. M. Bignon turned towards his friend with a surprised look; but M. Morel calmly said, "Brother Bignon, I have been listening to this young girl, and it seems to me that her plan is really a divine inspiration."

"M. Morel," exclaimed the *cure* of Mont-Saint-Jean, perfectly bewildered, "are you serious?"

"Assuredly," gravely said his friend; "cannot strong and perfect faith accomplish anything? The Gospel says so; and you and I are surely as much bound to believe in it as this peasant girl."

Again M. Bignon felt rebuked; but he began to think that he had been in the wrong, and now shone

forth the real beauty of his character, for, without any confusion or false shame, he turned towards Madeleine and gently said, "Child, I believe I spoke hastily a while back; yet God knows I thought I was right: but never mind, I will speak to Farmer Nicolas, and all shall be well again."

Again Madeleine quietly thanked him.

"Madeleine," said M. Morel, gazing earnestly on the young girl's thoughtful countenance, and speaking in a grave tone, "you have heard my words; to me your plan seems a thought sent by Heaven itself; but I know that to the worldly-wise it will be as folly. Remember, however, that the task you have taken on yourself is a serious one—one which few women could accomplish. But have you weighed every objection to it? Think of it well; you are still young; you may either love or be loved; it is in the order of God that those things should be. I speak not to you of mere worldly affection, but of that sacred bond which He himself has established between man and woman. I seek not to deter you, though I bid you pause; for once on the path, know that you must not even so much as look back behind you."

Whilst M. Morel spoke thus, a faint blush stole over the pale features of Madeleine; it lingered there awhile, then slowly died away.

"Sir," said she, in a calm though low tone, "I thank you for your advice, but it applies not to me; others may love and be loved; my lot is cast in solitude."

M. Morel once more turned his keen and piercing gaze on Madeleine; he marked the shade of sadness on her brow, the subdued and melancholy light in her eyes, and the low, mournful cadence of her voice. He was a priest, and had read many pages from the human heart; it needed no second glance to tell him the young girl's whole history.

"Madeleine," said he, gravely still, but in a more gentle tone, "some there are who are chosen by God to devote themselves to great and holy tasks; but

bethink you, they must give up even more than mere human love—every lingering desire otherwise harmless, every comfort of the flesh, every longing aspiration of the soul, must be quelled and subdued until the great end is won.”

M. Morel had begun speaking thus in his usually calm manner, but, as he went on, his voice assumed a deep and thrilling tone, and his severe, dark eye kindled with spiritual enthusiasm. Madeleine had understood the drift of his words more than their literal sense, but she replied, with her usual simplicity, “You speak of saints, sir, and I am only an ignorant peasant girl.”

M. Morel’s glance again fell upon Madeleine. She stood before him plain and unpretending, and looking indeed no more than a poor ignorant peasant girl. Yet there was serenity and determination in her features; they told not of doubt or of shrinking, but of a strong and enduring though gentle spirit. The priest was satisfied.

“I will only ask you another question, Madeleine,” he observed. “To me, I say it again, your thought seems a divine inspiration; but do you believe that there is in you the power of executing your task?”

Madcleine remained awhile silent, but she at length looked up, and, fixing her earnest look on M. Morel, calmly replied,

“I believe, sir, that since God gave me the thought, He will also give me the power.”

“Oh! faith, holy, perfect faith, what canst thou not overcome!” exclaimed the *cure* of Puyseye, in a low though thrilling tone. “Madeleine,” he continued aloud, “I see you are prepared; it is well, for there will be many thorns in your path; but trust to the faith within you and fear not. I shall see you again; go in peace.”

Madcleine thanked him quietly. Strange and unexpected as had been the success of her suit, and encouraging as was the reception she had received, she

now seemed more grateful than elated. Her faith was so true and deeply rooted that it lay beyond the reach of praise or blame, and the one could no more urge her on, than it was in the power of the other to deter her.

"You seem thoughtful, brother," hesitatingly observed M. Bignon to his friend, when Madeleine had left them.

"Yes, I was thinking of her, of this peasant girl—so plain in speech and look too; but God chooses his own instruments, and the more humble they are the greater is his glory. I must see her again, and speak to her," he added, after a short pause, and he fell once more into a fit of musing, from which the *curé* of Mont-Saint-Jean forbore to arouse him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE following week saw Madeleine in possession of Farmer Nicolas's house, which the owner let her have for the price she had offered. Some said that M. Bignon's eloquence had persuaded him to this extraordinary concession, for Farmer Nicolas was what is generally termed a hard man; but others asserted that M. Morel had agreed to pay the difference, and had thus overcome his scruples in the most effectual manner. It was not without a feeling of regret that Madeleine left her old dwelling near the little churchyard; she loved this quiet spot for its silence and solitude, and she felt more sorrow in parting from it than might have been anticipated from one of her apparently calm character.

"What ails you, Madeleine?" asked Marie Michon of her friend on the day of the removal. The old people were gone; the little furniture Madeleine possessed had already been transported to her new abode, yet she still lingered on the threshold of the now silent and deserted dwelling.

"Marie," she replied, in a voice that grew slightly tremulous as she spoke, "I have been happy here; my heart clings to this old place; how often have I sat on this very threshold in the sunshine, singing the ballads my father had taught me! When he died, and they laid him in the churchyard, I felt that I was still near him; but his grave will be lonely now! Yes, I have been happy here; it was by this window that I used to pray in the evening. When shall I pray and live here again, Marie?"

There were tears in her eyes as she spoke thus. Marie silently wondered at this, for she had beheld Madeleine bear far greater sorrows with what seemed

to her more than human fortitude. She could not see what was then passing in her friend's mind; she could not know how the dreams of her youth, of her love, of her fervent faith, of all that had once been dear to her, were linked with this homely dwelling and now filled her heart to overflowing. But, though not above the yearnings of humanity, Madeleine seldom yielded to them long: an inward voice soon bade her think of the task before her, and hush the earthly thoughts that rose up as though to bar her path; her momentary sadness passed away, and she resumed her usual serenity; yet as she closed the door of her former home, and turned away from it, she could not help looking back and exclaiming, in a fervent tone, "May the blessing of God be with thee." These words she repeated several times, as though unconscious of Marie's presence. She remained silent whilst they walked together along the path leading to Mont-Saint-Jean, but when they had almost reached the village, she stood still, and earnestly observed,

"Marie, I think I shall go back there to die. Yes," she thoughtfully continued, "with God's will it shall be so!"

"What a strange girl she is," thought Marie, "she talks about death as though it was merely a journey from one place to another."

Marie's surmise was more correct than she imagined, for to Madeleine death seemed indeed no more than the exchange of an earthly for a heavenly home.

Whatever her feelings might be on the subject of her removal, Madeleine did not allow them to interfere with her plans. She reconciled herself to her new abode, and spared nothing to render it as comfortable as its inmates could wish it to be. Though she had declared to the *curé* that the house was capable of containing seven or eight persons, Madeleine now saw that it might be made to hold ten; and, on discovering this, she could not find it in her

heart to allow it to remain, as she said, half useless. She was therefore no sooner settled in her present dwelling, with Mother Pierre, Catherine, and old Michel, than she began seeking for other inmates. The first she took in was a paralytic old man. He was not quite destitute, for he had several grown-up sons and daughters, but they treated him with harshness and neglect, and, when Madeleine offered to take him under her care, showed themselves glad to get rid of him. They hinted, at the same time, almost within the old man's hearing, that it was very strange in aged people to live so long after they had ceased to be anything but a nuisance upon earth. They also added, that Madeleine would find him of a harsh and disagreeable disposition. She saw that the old man had indeed a sour and repulsive aspect, but nothing could discourage her; and, though warned by every one that she would have occasion to repent her charity, she persisted in taking home old Joseph. Her next inmate was a poor abandoned idiot girl, who had come nobody knew whence, and lived on whatever the villagers gave her. Two more old women, one of whom was afflicted with a horrible cancer; a middle-aged man, disabled for life by an accident, which rendered him a burden to his family, instead of his being able to support them; and a poor beggar, blind from his infancy, were her other guests.

Madcleinc had before been called foolish, but every one now agreed that she was mad. How could she expect to support ten persons, and pay a heavy rent besides? When any one put this question to Madeleine, she candidly confessed that her means were small, but she always added her favourite axiom, "that Providence was good."

Still it was universally declared, that, though her intentions were excellent, her scheme would prove a failure; it was impossible to be otherwise. Summer passed away, however, and Madeleine persevered in her task. She paid her rent; provided good and plentiful food for her pensioners; took care that

they should always be decently clad; and did not seem disposed to break up her charitable establishment.

People now began to change their opinion. Some said that Madelcine had found a hidden treasure in the old churchyard; others, more pious, thought a daily miracle was performed in her favour. They went so far as to assert, that, though she had only put one sack of meal in it, her *huche* was never empty. To those who questioned her on the subject, Madeleine's answers might, however, have shown very clearly that the only miracles or treasures to which she could lay claim were ingenuity, perseverance, and industry.

When surprise was expressed that she could support so many persons, Madeleine never failed to remark, that six of her nine guests, being infirm and old, ate sparingly, which necessarily lessened the expense of their maintenance. The income which she derived from her few acres of land, and from her house near the cemetery, which she had let to a family of peasants, shortly after leaving it, sufficed to pay the rent of her present abode. The relatives of her guests also made it a point to contribute to their support, by occasional presents of meal or vegetables; and the most wealthy of the villagers, who all took great interest in her success, afforded Madeleine every assistance in their power. Her earnings, the produce of her garden, and, as she emphatically observed, the blessing of God, did the rest. As the value of her time was well appreciated by her pensioners, they aided her as much as their infirmities would allow. The task of attending on the woman afflicted with the cancer was, however, left to her; the young girl alone had fortitude enough to approach this unhappy being. Every one in the village liked, moreover, to do something for Madeleine. The young men were always ready to give her garden an hour's work at any time, so that she seldom had to touch it herself; and, whenever the women went to wash their own

linen at one of the neighbouring streams, they never failed to call upon Madeleine and take a little parcel of her things. "It did not make much difference to them, and it was so much the less for poor Madeleine to do."

Notwithstanding the aid she thus received, Madeleine perceived at the end of the summer that her expenses exceeded her income. It then occurred to her that the fruit in her garden was very fine, and might fetch a good price in the neighbouring town. M. Bignon approved the idea, and offered to lend her his mare, in order to go and sell it herself. She accepted, and accordingly set off one morning for the town of C——, mounted on the back of La Grise, with a pannier of fruit on either side of her. Though her journey, one of about twenty miles, was the longest she had yet taken, Madeleine felt neither flurried nor discomposed. She arrived safely at C——, sold her fruit to the best advantage, and returned with several five-franc pieces in her pocket, well satisfied with the result of her expedition. Encouraged by this success, she went twice again to C——, during the autumn. Farmer Nicolas declared that the garden had never yielded so much fruit before, and that he ought to raise the rent. Some people said it was all the work of Providence. The more worldly-minded spoke of the forbearance of the village boys, on whom Madeleine's gentleness had produced a more beneficial effect than all the former threats and constant watching of Farmer Nicolas, so that even the profane lads who did not scruple to steal M. Bignon's half-ripe pears, would not have laid a finger on her most ripe and tempting peaches. Madeleine rewarded their forbearance by gathering them around her, during the long summer evenings, when she sat on the door-step of her dwelling, and told them stories from her Sacred History, or sang some of her old ballads for their amusement.

M. Morel, who took deep interest in Madeleine,

was of great assistance to her now. He gave her little save advice, which was all that he could spare, but that was excellent. Madeleine proved a docile pupil, and she often improved on her instructor's hints. Her house soon became a model of neatness and comfort for the wild district in which she lived. Her garden was carefully cultivated, and stocked with medicinal herbs, of which the priest taught her the various properties. With a little money which he advanced she purchased a goat and a few hens. She soon learned to make excellent cheese from the goat's milk, and the eggs laid by the hens proved exceedingly useful. The money being repaid in small sums, the cost was scarcely felt. M. Morel likewise gave Madeleine many useful receipts, all tending to save something, either in fuel or in the consumption of food. She was much surprised to learn from him the value of things she had looked upon hitherto as wholly useless. This was excellent for manure, that would do for the hens—in short, everything was applied to some useful purpose; and, though each separate piece of economy was trifling in itself, the whole put together became of real importance. It was chiefly through this excellent management that Madeleine was enabled to support her large family during the whole summer, with every requisite comfort.

When winter came on, however, her resources lessened, though her expenses remained the same. Without allowing herself to be dismayed, Madeleine, according to her custom in difficulties, had recourse to prayer, and then applied the homely proverb, "Help thyself, and Heaven will help thee." It occurred to her, on seeing old Catherine knitting herself a pair of stockings for the winter, that some of her pensioners might thus employ their leisure, and add to her earnings. Those who were able to work entered into her views, and in a short time several dozen pairs of woollen stockings were produced. Madeleine knew they could not be sold in the village, where the women

were all expert in this branch of female industry, but the next time a pedlar stopped at her door, she asked him to purchase her little stock. The pedlar wanted to sell and not to buy, and it was with some difficulty he agreed to take the stockings for little more than the cost of the materials. The next time he called, there were plenty more stockings ready for him, but he refused to take even a few pairs, alleging that they were too difficult to be disposed of. Madeleine now began to think that fancy knitting might prove more successful. But who was to teach her the art in Mont-Saint-Jean, where its name was almost unknown? though she recollected having seen, a long time ago, a counterpane of different coloured worsteds in the possession of a travelling pedlar, who asked a high price for it. Madeleine was somewhat embarrassed, when it occurred to her that Dame Ursula, who boasted of her skill in every branch of female industry, might possess some knowledge of this. She accordingly called upon her one evening, and explaining the object of her visit, requested her assistance. Dame Ursula loved Madeleine, at least she said so, and she certainly gave her now a heroic proof of her friendship. She confessed, though of course it was through no want of ability, but merely because she cared little for such things, that she did not understand fancy knitting. But—and here was the heroism—Mademoiselle Antoinette was a great proficient in the art, and would, she knew, be very happy to give her any necessary instructions. She would go and see her the very same day, and request her assistance in Madeleine's name. There is something pleasant in true magnanimity, and Dame Ursula, who felt very magnanimous, accordingly paid a ceremonious visit to her rival, and explained the object of her visit. Mademoiselle Antoinette had heard her master speak highly of Madeleine, she was therefore all willingness to assist her, and received Dame Ursula with great courtesy.

In a few days Madeleine knew several fancy

stitches, and in another week she began a counterpane which, though not without reproach, promised to be finished speedily. But when she was perfectly mistress of the art, and ready to impart it to her pensioners, Madeleine discovered that they were not likely to prove very ready pupils. They were certainly willing to learn, but they were old; they had been accustomed to plain knitting for years, the intricacies of the new system puzzled them exceedingly, and they went so often wrong, and committed so many mistakes, that their labour proved almost worthless. Madeleine did not allow herself to be discouraged; she renewed her instructions with the greatest patience; but when weeks had elapsed and Catherine, her most proficient pupil, seemed as much embarrassed as ever, she began, though not without a feeling of regret, to think of abandoning the plan as hopeless. One day when, after giving the old woman her lesson, this thought again occurred to her, she noticed with surprise that, as soon as Catherine had laid down her work, in order to go into the garden, Annette, the idiot girl, who happened to be present, quietly took it up. Madeleine said nothing, but watched her attentively. To her infinite astonishment she saw that girl, who, either through stubbornness or stupidity, had obstinately refused to knit a stocking a few weeks previously, now do several rounds of this intricate stitch with the greatest neatness and accuracy. Madeleine, delighted to see her display this proof of intelligence, immediately went up to her and praised her skill. Annette drew herself up with conscious pride, and knitted with still greater rapidity.

"Do you know any stitch besides this?" asked Madeleine, after watching her for a while.

Annette nodded affirmatively, and, drawing from her pocket a set of knitting needles with which she had been practising in secret, began knitting before Madeleine every one of the stitches which she had endeavoured to teach old Catherine.

Madeleine's astonishment increased. She found it

difficult to reconcile the degree of talent now manifested by Annette with her natural deficiency of intellect; but, though she could not understand it, the fact was indisputable, and a little reflection showed her of what advantage it might now prove to her plans. She drew Annette towards her and laid her hand upon her head, for she had noticed that even this simple act enabled her to exercise more control over the wayward temper of the idiot girl, and, looking into her face with her grave yet serene glance, she gently said, "Annette, you know that I am poor, that I want money, will you help me to earn some by knitting me a counterpane?"

A strange and disagreeable expression overspread Annette's features; to ask her to do anything was almost to ensure a refusal, but, though Madeleine knew this, she neither saw nor wished to employ any other method of attaining her aim, save the direct and open one. She perceived, however, that on this occasion Annette hesitated to utter a refusal, and this led her to renew her request in the same calm tone, and almost in the same words which she had already used.

Annette seemed troubled and annoyed. She turned away her eyes, and then involuntarily fixed them once more on Madeleine's calm countenance, now looking down upon her. It would be hard to tell what thoughts then passed across her darkened mind; perhaps it was the mild look which met hers that moved her, or it might be the sense of power implied by Madeleine's attitude, for, with sudden and unwonted alacrity, she replied,

"Yes, I will."

The counterpane was begun the same day, and finished in two weeks; though the materials were coarse, the work was so fine and delicate that Mademoiselle Antoinette declared she had seen nothing like it during the whole course of her experience. When the pedlar came again, he agreed to purchase the article, and gave what he said was a fair price, though much below its real value.

From this time forward Madeleine devoted all her instructions to Annette. The rapidity with which the poor girl seized on and imitated everything done before her was truly wonderful, and could only be equalled by the delicacy and finish of her execution. It was chiefly on this account that her work always secured a good price, and became, in time, of considerable value to Madeleine.

Thus one of the most helpless and destitute beings which she had taken under her care, assisted her most **in** carrying on her pious task.

CHAPTER X.

By adopting the means detailed in the last chapter, Madeleine had the satisfaction of being able to maintain her pensioners in a state of comfort. She even found it in her power to relieve the most distressed amongst the villagers of Mont-Saint-Jean, to whom the winter was always particularly severe.

We have explained the different methods which Madeleine successively took to administer to the physical wants of her family, without alluding to her manner of governing it. This was exceedingly simple. Her first principle was that dictated by natural right, —equality. She found it, however, more difficult to apply than she could have imagined. In the first place, her pensioners had brought with them a fierce spirit of strife, which is too often a characteristic of the suffering poor. Madeleine had the greatest difficulty in eradicating this feeling. Old Mother Pierre and her friend Catherine agreed very well together, but dissension reigned among the rest. Madeleine was grieved, for she loved peace; she remonstrated, but, seeing that she produced no effect, she resolved to examine into the cause of the evil. She discovered that it chiefly proceeded from selfishness. Thus, for instance, old Catherine had a small looking-glass, which, though she only used it once a-day, she churlishly refused to lend to any of her companions, lest it should be broken. This so offended one of the old dames that, when the cold weather came on, she would never consent, notwithstanding Madeleine's entreaties, to allow Catherine to wear an old shawl of hers, which, as she had two far better ones, was almost useless to her. Catherine wanted some covering; Madeleine was therefore obliged to buy her a

coarse flannel cloak, and, as she was then rather short of money, the comforts of the whole family had to be restricted for more than a week in consequence. Several similar instances amongst the other pensioners convinced Madeleine that it was her duty to interfere; she was responsible for the support of the family, and it only seemed right that she should exert some authority over it, especially when that control was intended for the general good. One day, accordingly, she assembled her children, as she loved to call them, around her, and in a gentle though firm tone, explained to them that a better feeling must henceforth reign amongst them.

"You are all children of the one God," said she, gently; "He gives you food and shelter equally; why should you not also share his other gifts? I do not mean to bid some deprive themselves of what is needful to them, in order to give it to others; but let those who have more than they want give to those who have not enough."

If Madeleine, however, had uttered blasphemy, a greater outcry could not have been made by her pensioners than that which arose amongst them on hearing this; even the poorest had some article of which they feared to be deprived under this new law, and all united in agreeing that it would be much better for matters to stay as they were, and each to remain master of his own.

"Very well," calmly said Madeleine. "But, if this must be the case, mind it shall be so for every one amongst you."

They all declared that this was only just.

"Then," continued Madeleine, "what shall we do without Annette's gains? For, though she wants many things, you know that the money she earned often gave us food when we could not have got it otherwise. But henceforth it must be spent on her alone; for God forbid that we should wrong her of that which is her own, because she has not knowledge."

This argument produced a much better effect than more powerful reasoning would have done. It had not occurred to those who so selfishly refused to aid one another, that, if this principle had been applied by others to their own case, they would not only have never been received by Madeleine, but could not even, with anything like justice, have profited by Annette's gains, which, as she truly said, had often given them food. After a little more hesitation they submitted, though with evident reluctance, to Madeleine's proposed plan of equality.

Madeleine did not appear to notice their displeasure, but immediately applied her system; she used, however, the greatest moderation in doing so, never taking from her pensioners any articles but those which could be of little use to them. As they were all poor, she effected very few changes upon the whole, her chief object being to establish the principle, and restore harmony among the family. One of her first acts was to proclaim old Catherine's looking-glass public property.

"Do not be angry with me, Catherine," said she, noticing her chagrin, "the glass is still yours; only, as you cannot want to use it all the day long, lend it to others who have none. If it is broken it shall be replaced. Do you not see that you gain by this; for as long as you kept your glass to yourself, Marianne would not let you have a yard of her piece of tape? It is now yours as well as hers, and you can take as much of it as you want?"

"Well, I suppose you are right, Madeleine," pettishly replied the old dame; "but I would sooner keep my looking-glass to myself, and let Marianne have her tape."

Although she could not please every one, Madeleine persevered in her plan; she paid, however, the most scrupulous attention that equality should really reign amongst the members of her family. She did not exact that they should wear a uniform costume, and left them perfect freedom as to the colour and

materials of their dress ; but she took care that the articles should all be of equal value. Whatever piece of furniture she purchased, she always declared to be for general use ; she would never allow it to be called her own. Her example, of course, contributed to render her pensioners resigned to their fate, which was not a very unhappy one. Many of them, nevertheless, made occasional attempts to undermine her system, but they always failed in their object. Though she said little, Madeleine had a quiet strength of will, before which all yielded instinctively. It was not indeed in her nature to take a resolve and retract from it afterwards. She had none of that obstinacy which is so often termed firmness, but she never acted without having first thought maturely on the subject, and convinced herself that she was in the right. It was not to her own opinion that she adhered, but to the truth that was in it. This trait in her character had contributed to give Madeleine great influence over the helpless beings she had taken under her care ; they all saw that when she did anything it was for their good ; though it might be unpleasant to them, they could not help loving and respecting her ; the last feeling even predominated, and, as if by common consent, though many of them were more than three times her age, they all called her " their mother." She indeed provided for them, and saw to all their wants, with truly maternal solicitude ; and it was perhaps the protection she thus exercised over them that had induced her unconsciously to take the habit of designating and addressing them collectively as " her children."

It was not long before Madeleine perceived the excellence of the system she had adopted ; the quarrels which had grieved her ceased gradually, and, though occasional disagreements occurred, they were only such as human frailty rendered inevitable ; the peace, order, and regularity which reigned in her house, indeed, soon became proverbial in Mont-Saint-Jean. Madeleine was not possessed, however, by

that over-systematic spirit which seeks to regulate rigidly the most simple occurrences of our daily life. She had appointed no fixed time for rising in the morning, because some, being weak and infirm, necessarily wanted more repose than the rest; but the meals always took place at regular hours, and the whole family retired in the evening at eight exactly, with the exception of Madeleine, who sometimes stayed up to work.

The secret of the peace and regularity which marked her little household was in the bond of love and amity, which existed among its members. A harsh word never crossed Madeleine's lips, and, though some of her "children" were sufficiently peevish, her unvarying gentleness had its influence over them; there is no rebuke so powerful as silent patience. The unity of purpose which prevailed amongst her pensioners was likewise to be attributed to her influence. She always avoided even the appearance of domination; she explained to them every one of her plans, showing them how each might help her in furthering them, and, as those plans all tended towards one end, in which they felt equal interest, she seldom failed in securing their co-operation so far as it was required. Thus the household arrangements, such as they were, were carried out with the greatest order and regularity. Those whose common interest it is to agree, generally do so, and this was exactly the case with the members of Madeleine's family; owing to their helpless and dependent situation, they could have no separate hopes and wishes.

Though she was anxious that a religious feeling should prevail amongst her children, Madeleine laid down no strict regulations on this subject. When they sat down to a meal she never failed to utter a short thanksgiving; but, unless when they joined in public worship, they performed no other act of devotion in common; there was something more congenial to Madeleine's spirit in solitary prayer. If the custom of saying grace is too often profaned by being

uttered at boards covered with all the luxuries that can tempt the palate, it is always truly beautiful and affecting at the homely table of the poor. To one of Madeleine's strong faith, every meal was a direct bounty from Heaven—a kind of daily miracle—which should never be allowed to pass without acknowledgment.

Although, since she had taken possession of Farmer Nicolas's house, Madeleine had spoken little on the subject of her intended hospital, the thought had never for a moment left her mind. As soon as winter was over, and she felt relieved from present apprehension, she resolved to act. Never, indeed, had she been so strongly convinced of the necessity of an hospital in Mont-Saint-Jean. Towards the beginning of the spring she had lost two of her pensioners,—Michel, and the woman afflicted with the cancer. The old man died quietly, and almost unconsciously, like a child; the woman expired in a state of great suffering, but calling down a blessing upon Madeleine's name with her last breath. Her decease, which had long been expected, was a relief in every sense of the word. Madeleine immediately sought to fill the vacancies which had thus occurred in her family by taking in two other afflicted and unhappy beings. She soon found several individuals whose misfortunes gave them an equal claim on her charity, and her heart was filled with sorrowful pity when she felt that she could not receive them all. But even to think of this was out of the question; she therefore chose two of those who eagerly asked to be admitted, and sadly told the others that there was no room for them in her narrow home; she wept as she said so, and for the whole of that day there was a cloud of deep sadness on her brow. M. Morel called in the evening, as was his custom, when on a visit to his friend; he noticed Madeleine's melancholy, and inquired into its cause. She told him: he heard her in silence.

"Ah! sir," said Madeleine, in a mournful tone,

"there is much suffering and misery in Mont-Saint-Jean; but if we had an hospital all would be right again. I think of this both day and night, and I often seem to see a large handsome house on the brow of the hill, with a garden around it, and the poor dwelling within its walls which have never seen hunger or misery; but it is a mere dream, nothing but a dream, and when I waken from it I ask myself how long the poor must suffer still, or when will the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean exist."

"God alone knows, leave that to Him, Madeleine," solemnly replied M. Morel; "in the meanwhile do your appointed task; pause not, falter not, but go on."

"I will, I will," fervently exclaimed Madeleine.

"But how will you act?" asked M. Morel, looking at her fixedly.

"Sir," calmly answered the young girl, "I have been thinking of this for some time, and I believe the best plan will be, to ask the advice and assistance of Monsieur Dubois, the mayor; perhaps through his means the parish might do something for the erection of the hospital."

"The thought is good," said M. Morel, after remaining silent for a few minutes; "but, though I should advise you to make the effort, Madeleine, I do not think you will succeed. I know the mayor of Mont-Saint-Jean: he is proud because he happens to be rich; and thinks himself wise because he spent a few years in Paris, and there learnt to turn into ridicule the faith of his childhood. From him I hope nothing; go and see him nevertheless; but if he treats you with contempt or ridicule, heed him not, and keep to the faith within you."

Madeleine looked up at M. Morel with evident surprise, "Nay, sir," said she, quietly, "why should I care for contempt or ridicule as long as I know that Mont-Saint-Jean does indeed want an hospital?"

"You are right," replied the priest, eyeing her earnestly, "you are right, Madeleine, why should

you care for them ? There was no need for me to strengthen your faith ; it is a rare gift, child, cherish it and guard it well."

Madeleine paused in her work, and gazed on the priest with mild surprise ; she always wondered in the simplicity of her heart why he spoke and thought so much of her faith, which to her seemed so natural. She was on the point of asking him on this occasion the cause of this, but M. Morel suddenly began speaking of something else, and she refrained.

At an early hour the next morning Madeleine directed her steps towards the mairie of Mont-Saint-Jean ; it was a plain-looking building, and only to be distinguished from the houses which stood near it by the tricoloured flag waving over the door. When Madeleine entered, the mayor was alone with his official assistant, the adjoint. M. Dubois was a farmer of Mont-Saint-Jean, a good deal richer than his fellow-villagers, but very little more learned. He was a proud, consequential man, not without some good qualities, but full of his dignity and self-importance ; he was not, as M. Morel had truly observed to Madeleine, very remarkable either for the strength of his religious feelings or for the extent of his tenderness to the poor ; he affected, on the contrary, to speak of the encroachments of the clergy, and of the alarming amount of vice and idleness which prevailed amongst the indigent classes.

Jean Renaud, his adjoint, was a poor, timid, and spiritless being, admirably suited to act as the shadow of a great man like M. Dubois. The audacious idea of holding any other opinion than that of his superior on whatsoever subject had not yet occurred to him, and would probably have filled him with dismay. M. Dubois represented in his eyes the constituted order of things, and as such was evidently entitled to his respect and veneration ; this proved, of course, exceedingly gratifying to the mayor, and, to say the truth, he and Renaud went on very well together. They were engaged in a comfortable chat, in which M.

Dubois was all condescension, and Renaud all submission and respect, when Madeleine walked into the office.

"Oh! Madeleine Guérin, I see," said M. Dubois, as he eyed her somewhat superciliously, for, Madeleine being a kind of protégée of the *curé*, and M. Dubois conceiving himself bound in his quality of mayor to resist to the utmost all the encroachments of the clergy, it would not have done to be too familiar with her. "Well, my good girl, what do you want?" and M. Dubois threw himself back into his arm-chair with a very dignified air.

"I want your advice and assistance, sir," answered Madeleine.

M. Dubois smiled graciously, his stern visage expanded, and he immediately perceived that Madeleine was standing.

"Why, Renaud," said he, sharply, "what are you about; cannot you hand Madeleine a chair?"

Renaud, who had already begun to eye Madeleine with affected contempt, immediately started from his seat in a state of the most officious politeness.

"Well, sir," observed M. Dubois, in a still sharper tone than that he had just used, "I think you need not make so much fuss; the girl is not a duchess!" Renaud drew back abashed. "You can speak," said the functionary, nodding to Madeleine, on whom he hoped that this little display of official severity had produced a proper effect.

Madeleine, however, addressed him without the least awe or embarrassment. "You have perhaps heard, sir," she calmly observed, "that during the last year I have lived in Farmer Nicolas's house with several old and sick people, for whom, through the help of God, I have been able to provide?" M. Dubois nodded affirmatively, but like one who, though he had heard of the facts to which Madeleine alluded, would sooner give no opinion upon them. "Then you must also be aware, sir," continued Madeleine, "that there are a great many more poor and sick

people in Mont-Saint-Jean, and that this winter has been particularly severe for them?"

"Well, what about that?" sharply asked M. Dubois, who sometimes thought the poor still greater encroachers than the clergy.

"Merely this," calmly answered Madeleine, "that, as they ought to be relieved, I came to ask you to help me to learn how this should be done."

M. Dubois looked at her with amazement; upon which Renaud turned up his eyes, and lifted up his hands.

"And pray," exclaimed the mayor, in that peculiarly mild tone which often indicates a feeling very different from mildness, "pray what would you advise, my good girl?"

Madeleine noticed the irony of his manner; it did not, however, make her change her reply, for she composedly observed, "I think, sir, and I have thought so for more than a year, that there should be built an hospital on the slope of the hill of Mont-Saint-Jean; there, at least, the sick might be properly attended to, and the poor might find a home. I know that it would cost much to support, but I trust that God, who has given me the means of keeping ten persons with the help of a few kind individuals, would not desert me. But when I thought of this, I soon saw that to build an hospital would be far above my means; for what are my gains but a woman's gains? Then it occurred to me to apply to you for advice and assistance, for I hoped that through your influence the parishioners might, perhaps, be induced to lend a helping hand."

M. Dubois had by this time recovered from his amazement; he was at first tempted to give free vent to his indignation, and turn Madeleine out of the office at once for her pains, but it occurred to him that it would be more dignified to dismiss her with haughty and ironical contempt. "If I understand you aright," said he, in a calm tone, "it is your intention to have an hospital built on Mont-Saint-Jean?"

"With the help of God, it is," answered Madeleine.

"Very well, my good girl," mildly returned the mayor, "I admire your philanthropy, and the advice I have to give you is this,—build your hospital! and mind," he added, with great suavity, "whenever you wish to try to make a fool of me again, just call in here, and I will fine you for it. But, above all, do not forget to let me see your hospital when it is erected."

Madeleine looked at M. Dubois with such evident pity, that he had a mind to fine her on the spot for impertinence.

"I believe, sir," she calmly said, "that you are mocking me, and that you did not understand me rightly. The advice I asked was, not whether the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean should be built or not—for I know very well that it will be built one day—but concerning the means I should employ in order to erect it. Are you willing, as mayor of Mont-Saint-Jean, to help me in this? I ask to know no more."

There was something in Madeleine's tone and words which commanded a reply, and yet she spoke in her usually calm and mild manner, and without either affected dignity or pride. M. Dubois was more irritated by her composure than he would have been by her anger, had she betrayed any.

"Help you!" he indignantly replied. To Renaud, "She has the audacity to ask if I will help her!—Madeleine, I am a peaceable man, but it is as well not to rouse me. You had better go and mind what I say: no hospital of yours shall ever rise on the hill of Mont-Saint Jean."

"Nay, said Madeleine, calmly still, but colouring slightly with emotion as she spoke, "I thank God that it is not in your power to prevent it from rising there one day."

M. Dubois bit his lip, for he saw he had gone too far.

"Is the girl mad?" he exclaimed, with affected contempt. "Why, who talks of preventing her from building her hospital? All I mean to say, my good Madeleine," he added, with an ironical smile, "is, that your hospital will never rise on the hill of Mont-Saint-Jean, because you are too poor to build it yourself, and that you will find no one to help you to do that which is impossible." And M. Dubois threw himself back in his chair, and folded his arms, with the air of a man who has uttered an unanswerable proposition.

"Sir," quietly replied Madeleine, "I think you are mistaken."

M. Dubois looked on her with amazement, and repeated, "Mistaken!"

"Mistaken!" echoed Jean Renaud, aghast.

"Yes, I believe you are mistaken," composedly continued Madeleine, "for it seems to me that if God has allowed Mont-Saint-Jean to want an hospital, it could not be with the intention that it should never have one."

"Oh!" sneeringly replied the mayor, "M. Bignon, the *curé*, will explain all that to you; but, mind what I say, it is impossible."

"Sir," firmly said Madeleine, looking at him fixedly as she spoke, "that which is truly necessary is *never* impossible."

There was a conviction and energy in her tone, as she uttered these words, which startled even the sceptical M. Dubois; but, unwilling to betray this feeling, he coldly observed, "Very well, we shall see; but I really cannot afford to lose more time on this subject to-day," and the mayor glanced with a look of the utmost importance towards the papers and registers on the desk before him.

"Good morning, sir," calmly said Madeleine, rising, "I hope the day will come when you will think otherwise than you do now."

M. Dubois smiled incredulously as Madeleine left the office,

CHAPTER XI.

MADELEINE went home with a saddened heart. She had been prepared for the mayor's behaviour, and did not therefore feel discouraged by his refusal to lend her his aid; but she had not expected to find him so incredulous, and it grieved her deeply to see how little faith in the good and true there was in this world. To use her own words, it always seemed to her that whatever was necessary must also be possible; it might be difficult, tedious, of achievement—perhaps the work of many years, or of a whole life,—but, as long as it could be done, Madeleine thought this mattered little. It was not, however, in the power of M. Dubois' scepticism to disturb her own deep faith: that remained pure, strong, and unshaken.

Accustomed as Madeleine was to see every one of her schemes opposed by those for whose good they were meant, she had not expected the kind of persecution which her intention of providing Mont-Saint-Jean with an hospital now brought down upon her. Hitherto she had confided her plan only to M. Bignon and the *curé* of Puysey; but, after her interview with M. Dubois, it became generally known, and was soon the talk of the whole village. Every one was astonished and indignant. "How could Madeleine have the presumption of thinking to provide them with a kind of poor-house? It is true they were wretchedly poor, but what was that to her?" The next blame which they attached to the young girl was, that her preposterous confidence in her own resources would bring them into ridicule: they would now be spoken of as the fools of Mont-Saint-Jean, who wanted to build an hospital without money.

It would be useless to repeat the other equally wise objections which were raised to Madeleine's plan. Though she was grieved to be so misunderstood, she evidently set so little value on the remonstrances which poured in upon her from every quarter that they ceased to be offered to her. Yet there was nothing like scorn or contempt in her behaviour; she bore the most painful remarks with exemplary patience and gentleness, but at the same time with such a visible and entire determination of carrying out her plan, and of conquering in the end, that her character began to appear under a totally new aspect, even to those who knew her best. Another peculiarity in her conduct which surprised many individuals was, that she never seemed disconcerted or embarrassed by all the ironical questions and remarks addressed to her.

"Well, Madeleine, when will your hospital be built?" was the general inquiry of those who happened to meet her.

"When it pleases God," Madeleine usually answered, in a tone so calm and composed that the questioner found little more to say, and wondered whether she was in earnest or not.

But, with all her gentleness, Madeleine never allowed any argument against her plan to pass unanswered. In the first place she contended that an hospital would be useful.

"Well, but we are not all sick," once impatiently observed a woman of Mont-Saint-Jean to her, "and what will the hospital do for those that are in good health?"

"It will be useful to them also," said Madeleine.

This assertion seemed so preposterous to the woman, that, without waiting for an explanation, she turned away, and immediately informed every one she met that Madeleine had said, "an hospital would be useful both to the sick and the healthy," which was universally pronounced absurd.

"Well, Madeleine, how do you bear this?" asked M. Morel one evening as he paused before the threshold of her house, where Madeleine was sitting as usual at her wheel. She looked up, and, without making any reply, smiled in a grave and quiet manner peculiar to her, and which always imparted a singular and striking character to her features.

"You are right," said M. Morel, translating her meaning, "you are right, Madeleine, smile; for it deserves no more; but what will you do now?"

"I shall wait, sir," she calmly replied.

"I am afraid you will have to wait a long time," doubtfully observed M. Morel.

"I am young, sir."

"You are, Madeleine, and you seem to enjoy good health, but I need not tell you that the young may die, like those of many years."

"I know it, sir," gravely answered Madeleine, "but if God wishes me to do this task He will not call me away before it is finished."

"Then you have no intention of giving up your plan?" asked M. Morel, after a short pause.

"Nay, sir, God forbid," earnestly replied Madeleine, eyeing him with evident surprise. M. Morel smiled gently and kindly, for he found an ever new delight in making Madeleine display her simple and fervent faith, which in many points strongly resembled his own, and in some excelled it.

Without making any reply to her energetic denial, he bade her good evening, and passed on.

Beside M. Bignon and the *curé* of Puysaye, Madeleine had another friend who hotly defended the prudence and excellence of her intentions, and showed the greatest indignation when the least slur was cast upon them. This was Marie Michon; with the true instinct of affection, she drew nearer to Madeleine as the persecution increased, and, though the young girl needed no external sympathy to support her own strong faith, she felt grateful to her friend. This

feeling was increased by the painful circumstances in which Marie then stood ; she had lost her parents in the winter ; her elder brother, who had succeeded them, was harsh and unkind ; he was moreover going to marry, and had hinted to his sister that she might provide herself with some other home.

"Marie," said Madeleine one day when Marie had come to visit her, and looked more melancholy than usual, "would you like to live with me?"

"With you, Madeleine!" exclaimed Marie, colouring with glad surprise, "are you in earnest?"

"I am, and if you wish you can come ; but do not look so pleased, Marie," she added, with a kindly smile, "for indeed 'tis a poor offer ; recollect that I have nothing to give you ; that you will have to wait on sick and often ill-tempered old people, and to work for them, with little prospect of gain ; therefore be not too glad or too eager to come."

"I will be glad," replied Marie, whilst tears rose to her eyes, "for will you not let me love you, Madeleine ? and, though I am poor and ugly, will you not love me too ? which is more than any one, save my poor mother, has ever yet done ; indeed I will be glad."

Marie removed on the following day to her friend's house, and the zeal and even intelligence with which she aided Madeleine in all her plans of household economy soon rendered her an invaluable companion.

"What should I have done without thee ?" often observed Madeleine, in a grateful and affectionate tone, pausing in her work to look on her ever active friend.

No sweeter music could greet Marie's ear than those words uttered by Madeleine ; she felt that she was both useful and beloved, and the reproach which her ugliness might draw upon her now lost its power.

As Madeleine now spoke no more of her intended hospital, but went on quietly with her usual round of duties, many persons averred she had ceased thinking about it. But those who could imagine

this showed their entire ignorance of her character. Never had Madeleine's mind been so engrossed by this one thought; and that "God would vouchsafe to give her the means of accomplishing her aim," was the first prayer that rose to her lips in the morning and the last that dwelt in her thoughts at night.

Strong as was her faith in the future, Madeleine's plans were, however, somewhat disturbed by an event which occurred towards the middle of the spring. A gentleman of a speculative turn, who then happened to be in the vicinity, discovered on the hill of Mont-Saint-Jean, and near the spot which Madeleine had fixed upon as that best suited to her hospital, a spring, which, according to him, was possessed of strong mineral virtues. He immediately resolved to make a watering-place of Mont-Saint-Jean, and realise a fortune. His first act was to purchase the field in which the spring rose, and a large tract of land around it.

"Well, Madeleine," triumphantly exclaimed M. Du Bois to the young girl when he met her a few days after the deed of sale had been passed, "do you think now your hospital will ever rise on the hill of Mont-Saint-Jean?"

"The hill is not the only spot on which it can rise," calmly answered Madeleine.

But, though she strove to bear her disappointment with patience, she felt it keenly.

"For you see, Marie," she observed to her friend, "it was, indeed, the very best spot for it; being out of the village, the air is pure, the ridge of rocks shelters it from the northern and eastern winds, and the soil around it is of the best quality, as M. Morel has often told me; but the holy will of God be done."

In the meantime, M. Dupin, the speculator who had purchased the spring and the surrounding land, caused the works to proceed with great activity. In less than a few months a range of low buildings,

capable of accommodating a sufficient number of persons, and standing in the centre of a large garden, arose on the hill. As it was necessary that some time should elapse before the whole could be fitted up for the following spring, M. Dupin, who had until then superintended the works in person, returned to Paris, his usual residence, leaving the unfinished building under the care of one of the villagers. It was seldom that Madeleine went that way, but whenever she did pass the spot she could not smother the sigh which rose with the thought, "How well the hospital would have stood here!"

The spring, which had proved exceedingly variable and unwholesome, was now past, and summer drew on. Madeleine had lost two of her patients, old Mother Pierre and Catherine, who died within a few days of each other. Owing to Madeleine's care and vigilance, the rest of her family were in good health. Many individuals had suffered in the village,—fever was the prevailing complaint; and, though it had not yet assumed a directly contagious character, strong fears were entertained for the future. The months of May and June proved more favourable, and partly dispelled the apprehensions which had been entertained. Towards the beginning of July, however, alarming rumours were once more afloat; a strange, unknown malady had, about twenty leagues to the south of Mont-Saint-Jean, seized on the population of a small manufacturing town, and swept away a large portion of its inhabitants. This was at first no more than a vague tale, but it soon acquired fearful consistency. The fever, and it was one of the most pernicious nature, was swiftly drawing near. Its fatal effects had been witnessed in a village at about ten leagues' distance from Mont-Saint-Jean, where a farmer with his wife and child had been carried off in less than three days.

One evening when Madeleine was speaking with M. Bignon concerning the approaching danger, Ursula broke in upon their conference, and with alarmed

looks announced to them that an inhabitant of the nearest village was ill with the fever: a neighbour had just brought the tidings. The priest shook his head sadly, took his hat, and went to speak to the mayor. On her way homewards Madeleine saw by the pale faces and anxious looks of the individuals who conversed in groups, that the news had spread. In about an hour's time the public crier went through the whole village, stopping to beat on his drum at every thoroughfare, and proclaiming to the surrounding crowd that, as there was reason to fear the fever would soon reach Mont-Saint-Jean, the mayor warned them all to be on their guard, and, on its first approach, to apply at the mairie for whatever medicine might be necessary. No medical man resided in the village, nor even within several miles of it, and this had given rise to this useful precaution. Madeleine was standing on the threshold of her door with Marie Michon when the crier stopped before the house. As soon as he was gone, and the crowd which had gathered around him had dispersed, Madeleine turned towards her friend: "Marie," said she, earnestly, "you must promise to grant me one request; it is this—if I die you will continue to live in this house with my children. I do not ask you to take in any more, because, if you wish to marry or settle otherwise in life, it would be wrong in me to prevent you; but they are all old, with the exception of Annette; they cannot live long, and they do not cost much; promise me that you will not forsake them."

Marie burst into tears: "Oh, Madeleine," she exclaimed, in a broken tone, "I see what it is, you think you are going to die."

"Indeed I do not," gravely replied Madeleine, "and it is my daily prayer to God that He will allow me to live until there is an hospital in Mont-Saint-Jean."

This partly comforted Marie, but she soon observed, "Perhaps you wish to die when that happens, Madeleine?"

"I think it is a great sin to wish to die," answered her friend; "but if God calls me away when my task is fulfilled, shall I have a right to repine?"

Marie still felt uneasy; it seemed to her that Madeleine thought she should not live long if her task were, as she said, fulfilled, and in the instinctive dread which filled her mind, she hoped many years might elapse before this occurred. When Madeleine renewed her request, she, however, gave the desired promise with a more cheerful feeling than that which it had inspired.

In the course of the following day M. Détrimont, a medical man, who resided in a village several leagues off, and was now on his way to a small hamlet where the epidemic was raging, passed through Mont-Saint-Jean, and entered the mairie whilst Madeleine was there receiving medicines from M. Dubois. Though the doctor was not a man to put matters in their worst light, his apprehensions on the subject of the fever were evidently strong. That it would visit Mont-Saint-Jean was, he said, morally certain, and the villagers might as well be prepared for it as be taken by surprise. It would begin, perhaps, by one or two cases, as it had done at C——; but it would not leave the place without its full harvest of victims; the strongest precautions must therefore be used: and here Dr. Détrimont entered into a variety of explanations and recommendations useless to repeat. Madeleine listened to him attentively; and, when he had ceased speaking to M. Dubois, whom the Latin names of the medicines threw into a state of perfect bewilderment, she approached, and quietly asked him for a few instructions.

The doctor knew Madeleine, by having met her several times in the winter attending on the sick, and he had often admired the sagacity with which she administered the proper remedies in his absence, and observed the symptoms of the diseases. Though his manner was generally very rough and abrupt, he now complied with her request, which M. Dubois had

looked upon as a great piece of presumption, and patiently explained to her the use of the various medicines in her possession, as well as the precautions to be employed in order to prevent the contagion from spreading. Madeleine listened to him with the deepest attention, and promised to profit by his advice in case of an emergency.

"Why, who ever heard M. Détrimont speak so politely before?" imprudently exclaimed Jean Renaud, when the doctor had left the mairie.

"Hold your tongue, sir," sharply observed M. Dubois, for, though he had been entertaining precisely the same opinion, he did not care to give it utterance in the presence of Madeleine, who, even if she noticed it, was, however, the last person to be elated by the doctor's politeness.

Nothing occurred during the whole of that day to justify the apprehensions which had been conceived; but the next morning, when Madeleine left her house at an early hour in order to go to the mairie, she read the dreaded tidings in the eyes of the first person she met.

"Where is it?" she inquired.

"In the house of Michel Mandrin," replied the woman; "Heaven help us, this is a woeful day for Mont-Saint-Jean!"

"Who is with them?" asked Madeleine.

"No one as yet; it is he who is taken ill, and they say the three children are laid up too. They lost their mother last spring; but who knows that all is not for the best! His poor old mother came out at three o'clock this morning wringing her hands and asking for help; but, though they gave her some medicine at the mairie, no one would go in with her, nor even so much as touch her."

"Where is the *curé*?"

"Gone off on horseback for the doctor. Oh, blessed Mary, this is a sad day!"

Madeleine made no reply; but re-entering the house, she merely took a small basket, in which the

necessary medicine had been placed since the preceding day, and once more directed her steps towards the mairie. M. Dubois and Jean Renaud, both pale and anxious-looking, were talking to several terrified villagers. When Madeleine entered, they thought she came to announce some new misfortune, and immediately grew silent.

"Sir," said she, calmly addressing the mayor, "I come here to declare before you and every other person now present that if it does not please God to spare my life in this trial, I bequeath whatever I may die possessed of to Marie Michon, who has promised me to provide for my children when I am no more, as I did during my lifetime."

"Why, what do you mean?" cried the mayor, somewhat disturbed; "have you got the fever, that you talk of death?"

He had scarcely uttered the words when every one instinctively drew away from Madeleine, who soon stood alone in the centre of the room.

"No, thank God! I have not got the fever," she quietly replied; "but I am going to the house of Michel Mandrin, and, though I do not think so, yet, as I may never come out of it alive, I believe it right to provide in that case for those whom I shall leave behind me."

At this announcement every one drew round Madeleine again with expressions of sympathy and admiration. Even the stern heart of M. Dubois was softened by the young girl's calm and heroic devotedness.

"My dear Madeleine," said he, kindly, "this must not be. Michel Mandrin's mother can attend upon him for awhile. You only risk your life uselessly by going near them."

"She is old and weak," replied Madeleine; "what can she do? Besides, she may fall ill herself. I must go."

All those present looked on one another with silent

astonishment. Madeleine spoke so calmly that they could not understand her.

"But do you know that it is certain death to enter that house?" exclaimed one individual, addressing her.

"It is not certain death," she answered, firmly; "but even if it were, must they be allowed to die without help?"

"Madeleine," gravely observed M. Dubois, "I say again, this must not be. If you die, what will become of your hospital."

There was no irony in the mayor's tone, and indeed he was deeply moved. Though he was often selfish, and too fond of authority, he had many excellent qualities, which now asserted their supremacy, and spoke in Madeleine's favour. She heard him in silence; but at length observed, in a solemn tone,

"God alone knows whether I shall die or not in the attempt; yet I believe that He who gave me a task to accomplish will not call me away ere it is begun."

"Then you persist in going, Madeleine?"

"I must go, sir."

Exclamations of disapprobation were heard from all those present. "Do not go, Madeleine, do not go," was the remonstrance which assailed her on every side.

"I must go," she repeated, shaking her head, "indeed I must; seek not to detain me, but if you wish to help me you can do it thus. There is a low wall which extends at the back of Michel Mandrin's garden, you can easily lower down over it a basket with some provisions in it; if you will give me some paper, with pen and ink, I shall write for whatever I want and return it with the basket, but let no one save the doctor or the priest enter the house; it is sinful to risk our lives uselessly."

M. Dubois gave Madeleine the articles for which she had asked; after placing them quietly in her basket, she prepared to leave the office. If she had

been going to certain death, scarcely less emotion would have been testified by the assistants. "Farewell, Madeleine, may God bless you!" was the sorrowful exclamation uttered, as though she were never to return, which she now heard everywhere around her. Madeleine was moved, but not dismayed by those proofs of affection; she spoke cheerfully, and returned the blessings of all with a grave and kindly smile.

"There goes a noble girl!" exclaimed M. Dubois as she left the office, and there was not one present who did not fervently echo the sentiment.

Madeleine found the streets of Mont-Saint-Jean as silent as the grave. Occasionally, however, some anxious face would appear at a window and vanish again. A few persons, who from the direction which she took guessed her object, opened their doors and came out to remonstrate with her. But no warnings, however urgent, could prevail; Madeleine remained unmoved. On reaching the infected house, she found that even the neighbouring dwellings had been deserted by their terrified inhabitants. The door of Michel Mandrin's abode was still half open, but no one, for any sum, however large, would have crossed the fatal threshold. Madeleine entered unhesitatingly.

Before closing the door behind her, she turned round and waved her hand in token of farewell to a few women who had followed her at a distance, and now watched her movements. As she stood before them in that solemn moment, calm and serene, whilst entering the house of death, they felt that Madeleine looked like some holy spirit on the brink of a better world.

CHAPTER XII.

M. BIGNON came back alone towards noon ; the fever was raging in all the neighbouring villages, not a single doctor had been able to accompany him.

When he was told of Madeleine's conduct, his eyes filled with tears, and he merely observed, "She is a saint, and the spirit of God is with her."

Though Marie partly suspected Madeleine's intention in case the fever should break out, she knew not that she had carried it into effect until apprised of this fact by one of the women who had seen her friend entering Michel Mandrin's house. She at first turned pale on hearing this, and was much agitated ; but she soon remarked, in a composed and resigned tone, that Heaven would surely watch over Madeleine. Great anxiety prevailed in the village during the whole of the day, for Doctor Détrimont's prediction, that the fever would not be satisfied with one or two victims, recurred to all, and contributed to increase the gloomy feelings visible on every countenance.

Towards evening a basket of provisions was lowered down over the garden wall of Michel Mandrin's house, according to Madeleine's request. Jean Renaud, whom M. Dubois had commissioned to execute this task, heard the basket touching the ground, and, without waiting till Madeleine should appear, he hurried away, having previously fastened the rope from which it was suspended to a neighbouring tree. He came the next morning and drew up the empty basket, to which a small piece of paper was attached with a pin. It was not without using the greatest precautions that Jean ventured to carry this dangerous article to the mairie, where M. Dubois submitted

Madeleine's letter to various fumigatory processes before he attempted to touch it. As an anxious crowd had by this time gathered round the office, the mayor stepped out, and, standing on the flight of stone steps, gravely announced that he was going to read Madeleine's letter aloud. A deep death-like silence immediately prevailed, every breath was hushed, though many hearts beat audibly. M. Dubois put on his spectacles, unfolded the small scrap of paper, coughed, and in a loud tone read the following words :—

“ Michel Mandrin died last night ; his mother and all the children are very ill. Pray for us.”

“ May the peace of Heaven be with his soul ! ” exclaimed M. Dubois, in a tremulous tone ; and, though he often boasted that he was not a devout man, he now doffed his cloth cap and bent on one knee. Of all those present there was not one who did not follow his example, all uttering, in a deep, heartfelt tone, “ Amen.”

The mayor was the first to rise ; he still held Madeleine's brief letter in his hand, and, as he once more glanced over it, he perceived a few words written in one of the corners, and which had previously escaped his notice. Signing every one to be attentive, he thus resumed his reading :

“ I have laid out the corpse, and conveyed it, with the help of old Mother Mandrin, to the garden, whence it can be taken away, in order to receive Christian burial ; but let no one enter the house, for I stand in need of nothing.”

A dead silence followed this communication. M. Dubois was at first much disturbed, but, aware that the eyes of all were upon him, and actuated also by a conscientious desire of fulfilling his duty, he succeeded in banishing every outward sign of emotion, and said, in a tone of seeming cheerfulness “ Well, my friends, this is no pleasant duty, but it must be done ; who will come with me to take poor Michel's body away ? ”

No one answered this appeal. The mayor repeated his question; a peasant then stepped out from the crowd and observed :

"Others may speak for themselves, but I will not risk my life merely to bury the dead."

These words were received with a general murmur of approbation.

"Jacques, you are a coward," indignantly cried the mayor. "Jean Renaud, follow me."

But, though the adjoint said, "Yes, sir," he did not move from the spot where he was standing, and his pale countenance and trembling limbs showed M. Dubois that it was hopeless to count upon his aid.

"Come," said he, once more addressing the crowd, "I only want one man to help me; who will show his courage now?"

There was some stir amongst the men, but none came forward; a few of those who thought themselves unperceived silently crept away.

"Go, then, for a set of cowards," exclaimed the mayor, no longer endeavouring to control his indignant contempt; "not one amongst you has the one-tenth of Madeleine's courage, since you dare not even remove the dead body of him whom she feared not to attend."

His angry glance fell, as he spoke thus, on Jacques, to whom he attributed the disinclination to accompany him manifested by the crowd. The man turned pale as he met his eye; he seemed irresolute for a few moments; fear kept him back, but shame urged him on; at last he came forward, and said, in a determined tone, "I will go with you, M. Dubois."

"Or I will, and I will," immediately cried several voices.

"Peace," sternly said the mayor, "no one shall come with me but Jacques; you may go home."

The abashed crowd dispersed, and M. Dubois proceeded with his companion to the house of Michel Mandrin. By taking down a few stones from the low

and loosely-built garden wall, they easily bore the corpse away; it was immediately put into a coffin and conveyed to the church. Whilst reading the prayers for the dead, M. Bignon was deeply affected; and when, on returning from the churchyard, he re-entered his house, he sat down with evident agitation on the chair offered to him by his old house-keeper.

"Why, monsieur, what is the matter with you?" she exclaimed, noticing his emotion. "Ah, I see what it is; you take it all to heart as though it were your own case; you are so good!"

"Praise me not, Ursula," hastily interrupted the priest, in a tremulous tone; "my place is by the death-bed of every member of my flock, and yet I allowed Michel to die alone; I have acted like the negligent and mercenary pastor, and not as the faithful shepherd. Poor Michel! yet, Heaven be praised, he was a good and pious man! But this shall happen no more; his mother is ill, I must go and see her; Ursula, give me my hat."

"Jesus, monsieur, you cannot mean to go; you look very ill."

"Peace, Ursula, do as I bid thee; I am quite well."

"Sir," solemnly said the housekeeper, now really alarmed, "you look unwell; your lips are as pale as ashes."

"Well, I believe I am rather faint," replied M. Bignon, whose features were deadly pale; "give me a glass of wine, Ursula, before I go."

But Ursula had not had time to obey the order, when the priest staggered and fell back in his chair. She immediately summoned assistance, and had her master conveyed to his bed. When he opened his eyes he was slightly delirious, and every one pronounced him afflicted with the fatal fever; but Ursula, who had seen him in the same state once before, knew that his illness was only caused by the heat and exertions of the preceding day, and was not therefore likely to terminate fatally if properly treated.

On the evening of this day the basket of provisions destined for Madeleine was lowered over the garden wall, as on the preceding occasion; it was drawn up the next morning with a letter, which M. Dubois again read outside the mairie to the assembled crowd: its contents ran thus:—

“Mother Mandrin is very ill; I scarcely think she will live beyond the night; the children are in the same state; we all need your prayers.”

“Poor Madeleine! how much she has to go through,” exclaimed Marie Michon, who assisted at the reading of the letter, though she had been absent on the preceding day; “may God watch over her!” she anxiously added, as the crowd dispersed in gloomy silence, and she took her way homewards.

M. Dubois immediately despatched Jean Renaud in search of Doctor Détrimont, or of any other medical man, but he proved as unsuccessful on his errand as the *curé*, and came back alone in the evening.

In her letter on the following day Madeleine announced the deaths of Mother Mandrin and of the two eldest children. “I have placed them,” she stated, “in the garden. The poor old woman was very thin and light to carry. Though little Lise still lives, I do not think she will survive her brothers long.”

These melancholy tidings spread the deepest consternation throughout Mont-Saint-Jean. The mother and children of Michel Mandrin were buried near him the same day, without any of the customary rites for the dead, for M. Bignon was still very ill, and it was not thought expedient to delay the funeral until one of the neighbouring clergymen could be summoned.

In the course of the following day, M. Détrimont came to the village, and immediately entered the house of death. In about half an hour he came out again; a numerous crowd awaited his egress at some distance.

“How is Madeleine?” eagerly asked Marie Michon, coming forward.

"Well, but very much fatigued."

"Ah! may Heaven bless her!" exclaimed many voices.

"How is the child?" was the next question.

The doctor shook his head: "There is little hope," he briefly said, proceeding without loss of time to the house of the *curé*; whom, owing to the judicious treatment of Ursula, he found much better.

The doctor's reply caused great anxiety and disappointment in the village. The four successive deaths which had taken place in the fated family of the Mandrins had filled every heart with gloom and terror, and caused a superstitious value to be attached to the life of the child. Madeleine's letter on the following day only confirmed the fears generally entertained. "Lise is still in the same state," she said; "I dare not hope, but oh! how I have prayed that God may spare the life of this child!"

On hearing these tidings many sadly shook their heads, and predicted that Lise would follow her relatives to the grave; others more sanguine persisted in hoping for her recovery; but all agreed that the basket ought to be returned before the evening, with a request that Madeleine would let them know how the child was. Madeleine's reply differed but little from her last letter; "The child," she said, "still continues in a most precarious state. There is little reason to hope."

Two days thus elapsed, during which Madeleine alternately spoke of Lise as on the brink of the grave, or as getting somewhat better. The whole of that time, little else was thought of in Mont-Saint-Jean save the state of the child's health, as announced by her various letters. It was not until the eighth day of her abode in Michel Mandrin's house, that Madeleine communicated the hopes of Lise's recovery, which she then began to entertain. The child, she said, though weak, was certainly much

better. These tidings sprcad the most unfeigned joy in the village, but the feeling was immediately chilled by Madeleine's next letter. "I hoped for too much," she sorrowfully observed, "Lise is ill, very ill, again."

For three days the child remained literally between life and death; a general gloom seemed to hang over Mont-Saint-Jean, and when, on the Sunday morning, M. Bignon, who was now recovered, requested, after mass, the congregation to pray for Lise Mandrin, now dangerously ill, the most fervent prayers were offered up in her behalf.

On the morning of the third day Madeleine's letter was expected with the greatest impatience. As soon as he had received it, M. Dubois unfolded it with a trembling hand, and read its contents aloud to the anxious and silent crowd which had gathered round the mairie.

"God be praised for his infinite mercy! the dear child is saved."

Glad exclamations arose on every side; if some piece of good fortune had happened to all Mont-Saint-Jean, greater joy could not have been manifested. The stoic M. Dubois himself was obliged to wipe his spectacles, which had unaccountably grown dim; Jean Renaud applied his coat-sleeve to his eyes; M. Bignon, who was present, audibly returned thanks to Heaven, and many followed his example.

"Poor Madeleine! how happy she must be, and yet how fatigued!" was Marie Michon's remark.

In the course of the same day Madeleine was seen to leave the house of sickness; a few of the most courageous of those who witnessed her egress ventured to approach her near enough to question her concerning her health, and that of Lise.

"She sleeps," answered Madeleine, with a smile of pure happiness which an angel might have envied.

"And how are you, dear Madeleine?" exclaimed one individual, "how wearied you must be!"

But, though Madeleine did indeed look pale and fatigued, few persons could have suspected, on seeing

her, how she had been employed for the last twelve days. Her attire was not quite so neat as of wont, but she wore the calm and composed aspect which generally characterised her.

"I am well, thank you," she replied to those who questioned her; "but delay me not, for I have little time to spare, and the dear child may wake."

She accordingly went on, and soon reached the village church; she entered it, and, kneeling near the door, remained a few instants engaged in prayer, after which she rose and proceeded to her dwelling. On seeing her Marie Michon uttered a joyful exclamation, clasped her in her arms, and then began to weep. Madeleine embraced her tenderly, but, explaining to her that she had only come for the purpose of changing her attire, and procuring several articles of which she stood in need, she gently put her aside, and proceeded to her own room. In less than five minutes she came out again, with a small bundle of things in her hand. "Good-bye, Marie," said she, kindly, "watch well over my children; I shall come again to-morrow." And, without pausing to speak to the *curé*, or to M. Dubois, who were both waiting for her at the door, she hastened back to the house where the sick child lay sleeping.

In a few days M. Détrumont declared that Lise could be safely removed to Madeleine's dwelling, which was accordingly done. She grew rapidly better, and her recovery was looked upon as a kind of miracle in the village. The child's nearest relatives, indeed, called Madeleine her guardian angel, and unanimously requested her to take the sole charge of Lise, and administer the little property to which she was entitled. Madeleine joyfully agreed to this, for her only fear had been to lose her whom she already called her daughter. Never, indeed, had her heart clung so closely to human being as it now did to that child. She felt a claim upon her. Had she not snatched her from the grave? might she not truly call her her own?

CHAPTER XIII.

THE recovery of little Lise had led many people to hope that the fatal malady by which her family had been carried off would exercise no further ravages in Mont-Saint-Jean. When Doctor Détrimont heard any one giving utterance to this opinion, he shook his head, and declared that he did not feel so sanguine. Time unfortunately showed the correctness of his surmises.

Towards the close of the week in which Madeleine had left the house of the Mandrins, several cases of the same malignant fever by which they had been attacked manifested themselves almost simultaneously in the village. Madeleine no sooner heard of the event than she hastened to the bedside of one of the sufferers. She there met the doctor, who had been called in, as he fortunately happened to be on the spot.

"Well, Madeleine," said M. Détrimont, whose respect for the young girl's character always showed itself in the tone of equality with which he addressed her, "what shall we do now?"

"Is the fever truly contagious?" asked Madeleine, in French.

"It is," gravely replied the doctor, in the same language, which was understood by none of the rest present.

"Then I think we had better remove all the patients to the house of Michel Mandrin," promptly answered the young girl; "it has been well aired since I left it, and as, from what you said, I feared what was going to happen, I privately placed in it all the necessary linen and the little medicine I had

left; I can spare two beds, which I shall send down immediately."

"Do," approvingly said the doctor; and Madeleine immediately left the house on her errand.

In the course of the same day three sick persons were conveyed to the house, which, owing to Madeleine's prudence and forethought, was ready to receive them. As the doctor went over it and superintended all her arrangements, he could not but admire inwardly the coolness and self-possession of that simple peasant girl, who, though so quiet and silent, always seemed ready for any emergency, however great or sudden.

"Madeleine," said he to her in the evening, "the fever is over in all the neighbouring villages; I fear that it is now the turn of Mont-Saint-Jean to suffer from it, and that this is only the beginning of a great trial; M. Bignon has offered me a bed, and, as I believe that my services are more needed here than elsewhere, I shall stay."

"Thank you, sir," earnestly replied Madeleine, "I did not like to say so, but it also seemed to me that the fever was going to spread."

"And how did you know that?" asked M. Détrimont, with some surprise.

"I noticed, sir, that just before Mother Mandrin and her two grand-children fell ill their skin became slightly yellow, and this morning, when we removed Julien, I thought I saw the same colour on his wife's countenance; that was why I so earnestly prayed her to come here if she felt at all unwell. It also seemed to me, as we came along, that several persons looked ill and sallow, and this made me fear many were going to suffer from the fever."

"You are right; that is one of the signs of illness," answered M. Détrimont, "and it sometimes appears for several days before any other symptom is manifested. I also noticed the sallowness of Julien's wife, and this it is that induced me to remain."

The event showed that neither the doctor nor

Madeleine had been mistaken in their melancholy previsions. The next day several other persons were taken ill with the fever, and found a refuge in the temporary hospital.

In less than a week it was quite full, and there were, unfortunately, many other cases of illness in the village. Owing to the intermixture of the sick with the healthy, a large number of individuals who might not perhaps have been attacked otherwise, fell ill and died; the survivors, who trembled every moment for their lives, now began to understand what Madeleine had meant by saying that an hospital would be useful both to those who were sick and to those who were not.

During three weeks the fever raged in Mont-Saint-Jean with the greatest violence; nothing could exceed the devotedness displayed by Madeleine, M. Détrimont, M. Bignon, and his friend M. Morel. Madeleine especially seemed indefatigable; no vigil was too long for her, no task too repulsive or loathsome; she appeared, indeed, above mortality in her power of endurance and unwearied zeal. When the villagers thought of the strong spirit enshrined in that fragile form, they could not help fancying her, in their gentle superstition, some angel in disguise come to bless Mont-Saint-Jean with its presence. As long as the fever lasted, that is to say, for upwards of three weeks, Madeleine never once rested, even for an hour. It was in vain that M. Détrimont remonstrated with her, and assured her repeatedly that she was killing herself.

Madeleine persisted in her labour of love.

"If I do not watch by the sick and attend upon them, who will do it?" she simply asked; and the doctor knew well enough that, though every one admired Madeleine, few would care to imitate her self-sacrifice. When about one-eighth of the population had been carried off, the fever gradually ceased; it was then that the fearful ravages it had made became more fully apparent. Few families had escaped

without the loss of one or more of their members, and two individuals had been attacked in Madeleine's household: these were Joseph, the surly old man, who had now been with her upwards of a year, and Annette the idiot girl. Both Madeleine and Marie Michon were unremitting in their attentions on the two patients, who seemed in a fair way of recovering; but, though M. Détrimont had pronounced her out of danger, Annette, who indeed appeared much better, suddenly became worse, and expired on the sixth day of her illness. Old Joseph, on the contrary, rallied, and was soon quite well again, though he still remained bedridden. Every one, save Madeleine, murmured at this dispensation of Providence, for Joseph was only a burden upon her, while the poor idiot girl's industry had proved of incalculable advantage to her during the winter.

But, though Madeleine deeply regretted the loss of Annette, she did not, on that account, neglect paying every necessary attention to Joseph. If the old man felt any gratitude for her kindness, he gave no proof of the feeling, and showed himself as surly, disagreeable, and morose as he had ever been. Marie, who could not understand Madeleine's unwearied patience and gentleness, assured her she was acting injudiciously, and hinted that Joseph would be all the better for a little occasional roughness and severity.

"Nay," gravely observed Madeleine, "is it because he does wrong that we must do wrong also?"

Marie felt reproved and said no more.

Amongst the deaths which were universally lamented, none caused such deep feelings of regret as that of M. Morel. Like Madeleine, he had shown himself indefatigable in attending on the sick, for he well knew that the efforts of M. Bignon's zeal would prove inefficient if left unaided. He ministered, moreover, to both body and soul, and was always in the scene of the greatest danger. He and Madeleine constantly met by the bedside of the sufferers, and, if the young girl's strong faith and charity had needed

any encouragement or support, she would have found both in the brief though fervent exhortations to persevere in her holy duty which were addressed to her by M. Morel. The monotonous routine of duties in which his life had been spent had not been able to subdue the native energy of the *curé* of Puysaye's character. His first intention in embracing the priesthood had been to devote himself to missionary labours; but, though he had subsequently changed this resolve in order to embrace the humble life of a parish priest, the thirst for wider exertions and more arduous duties which had first actuated him was not extinguished in his soul; and, whilst devoting himself to the task of ministering to the spiritual and bodily wants of the sick, he looked forward with a solemn joy to the probable martyrdom that awaited him.

One evening, when he was administering the last sacraments to a dying woman, M. Morel felt a sudden sickness coming over him. He immediately knew the nature of his case, and instinctively foresaw that it would end fatally. By a strong effort of will, he suppressed, however, every outward sign of emotion or illness, and calmly continued his office. When the sick woman had received extreme unction, and was evidently near her departure, he knelt by the side of the bed, and prayed aloud for the soul that was going to pass away. Madeleine was present. She had often heard M. Morel praying before on similar occasions, but never had she been impressed so much as now with the fervour of his tone, and the inspired language which fell from his lips. When he spoke of the glorious immortality which awaited the dying Christian, of that world where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest, she saw his pale and thin cheek grow flushed, and marked the kindling of his sunken eyes: he bore no outward symptoms of disease, yet it seemed to Madeleine, though she knew not why, that his abode on earth would be brief. When the last breath had left the body of the dying woman, M. Morel, who had been upheld till then by the mere

force of his will, passed his hand across his brow, staggered, and would have fallen back, had not Madeleine ran to his support. He was immediately conveyed to his bed. M. Bignon, almost distracted with grief, insisted on attending on his friend, and unless when called away by his duty, refused to leave him.

On the evening of the third day of M. Morel's illness, M. Détrumont, who had declared from the first that there was no hope of his recovery, now said that the patient could not outlive the night. M. Morel heard him with a calmness which amounted almost to joy, and requested to speak to Madeleine. There existed between the *curé* of Puysaye and the peasant girl of Mont-Saint-Jean a strong feeling of sympathy, which, though not manifested by words, had long been felt by both. They were kindred spirits in this sense, that on entering life they had both set before them a great end, to accomplish which they laboured with unwearied perseverance, speaking of it, however, more by deeds than by words. When Madeleine drew near his bed-side, M. Morel took her hand, and said, earnestly,

"Madeleine, I wanted to bid you farewell; I am dying, and shall never see your hospital; and yet I know, for the spirit of God is indeed with you, that it will rise one day on Mont-Saint-Jean. I told you once that you would find many thorns in your path, and I tell you so again; yet be of good cheer, and be true to your task; for what is there in heaven or earth that love and strong faith may not overcome? Farewell. Do not forget to pray for me. Farewell."

"Alas, sir," sorrowfully exclaimed Madeleine, "who will advise me when you are gone?"

"God will be with you, Madeleine. Once more, be of good cheer. Farewell."

Madeleine, however, would not leave the room; she remained until all was over. In a few hours M. Morel expired, comforting those around him, especially his sorrowing friend, and behaving with calm fortitude. For about half an hour before his disso-

lution he became slightly delirious, and uttered the name of Madeleine several times with the greatest earnestness. When this circumstance was reported, many individuals said that he had had a vision concerning her; but M. Bignon and the doctor, who both knew how much the young girl had lately been in his thoughts, attributed this fact to perfectly natural causes. The good people of Mont-Saint-Jean, however, persisted in their belief, which contributed to invest Madeleine with a supernatural character.

The death of the priest of Puysaye was long and deeply lamented. His devotedness to the sick had endeared him as much to the inhabitants of Mont-Saint-Jean as to his own parishioners, who, now that he was no more, began to perceive his numerous virtues in their true light. They lamented him still more when his successor, a good man, with good intentions, but wanting his enlightened zeal, came to replace him. By no one, however, was his loss so deeply felt as by the poor *curé* of Mont-Saint-Jean. M. Bignon now literally seemed like a body without a soul; he had so long been accustomed to rely on his friend's judgment for every thing he said or did, that he scarcely knew how to act. Though he professed himself resigned to the decrees of heaven, his disconsolate aspect, as he wandered up and down, seeking he knew not what, protested eloquently against his words. His only comfort consisted in speaking of his deceased friend to Madeleine; she had known him, and he instinctively felt that she could appreciate the real beauty and worth of M. Morel's character. She was, moreover, dear to him, not only for her own sake, but also for that of the friend who had uttered her name so often on his death-bed. M. Bignon remembered likewise the high opinion which the *curé* of Puysaye had entertained of Madeleine; and this, joined to his own natural humility, soon made him look on the young girl with an affectionate feeling, strongly mingled with respect.

Two years had now elapsed since Madeleine had

first conceived the project of her hospital; and, though little advanced in other respects, she thought she had won a great point by causing the feasibility and necessity of her plan to be generally acknowledged. She was, indeed, no longer considered as a visionary girl, ready to take her own impracticable fancies for what was right; every one, M. Dubois included, granted that an hospital would be one of the most useful institutions the village could possess; and many individuals, who seemed to think that nothing was beyond Madeleine's power to perform, anxiously asked her when it would be erected and established. Her reply, that she knew not, was received with evident doubt and disappointment.

Nothing, however, could exceed the love and reverence now universally felt for Madeleine. Young as she was, she received more respect than was paid to the elders of the village; and so completely was her character understood, that, whenever some infirm being was left helpless and destitute, the villagers significantly remarked to one another, "Depend upon it Madeleine will take in that one also." And few indeed were the claims she could possibly admit which Madeleine ever rejected. Though her resources had been considerably straitened by the death of Annette, her charity still seemed inexhaustible. Not satisfied with lodging and feeding the poor in her own house, she relieved, as much as her means allowed, those whom she could not receive. None who sought her aid were repulsed; when she had nothing else to bestow, she gave a piece of bread, and often parted with her own garments to clothe some destitute woman or child. Even unknown wanderers were never turned away; they had only to plead hunger and fatigue in order to be admitted, and obtain a meal and a night's lodging. The villagers soon learned to compare her hospitable dwelling to that of Abraham the Patriarch; and many declared that, instead of being impoverished by giving away, Madeleine only became richer, through a species of miracle,

which they did not however pretend to explain. When she heard them speaking thus, Madeleine smiled, and told them that the only miracle performed in her favour lay in the goodness of Providence.

All these charitable tasks could not, however, divert Madeleine's mind from the great thought of her life, the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean. One day, when she was, as usual, meditating on the subject, and sitting at her door in the pleasant sunshine of an autumn evening, smiling on little Lise, who played near her, a woman who was passing by entered into conversation with her, and after a few desultory remarks observed, that she had doubtless heard the news.

"What news?" inquired Madeleine.

"Why, do you not know that the rich gentleman who bought all the land on Mont-Saint-Jean is dead? for it seems that the spring which he had taken for such a fine one was worth nothing, after all his expense and trouble; and they say that he actually died from vexation; however that may be, his heirs are going to sell the whole concern."

"Are you sure of this?" earnestly asked Madeleine.

"Oh! yes, quite sure," said the woman, naming the individuals from whom she had received the information.

The same evening Madeleine ascertained the truth of the report, and several additional particulars of importance. After consulting with M. Bignon, who approved of her intention, she resolved to go and speak to the mayor, which she accordingly did, the next morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Madeleine entered the mairie she found M. Dubois seated at his desk, with Jean Renaud near him. Although he partly guessed the nature of her business, the mayor received Madeleine very graciously. "Sir," she simply said, when on his invitation she had taken a seat, "I am come about the hospital."

"Well, what of it, Madeleine?" asked the mayor.

"Do not you think, sir, that we want one very much?"

"Well, I will not deny it—we do; but where are the means of procuring one?"

"That is just what I wanted to speak to you for, sir," replied Madeleine. "I suppose you know the new house on the hill is to be sold?"

"Yes, I do know it. What of that?"

"Why, sir, there is an hospital already built for us."

"Well," impatiently observed the mayor, "but it is necessary to buy it first."

"Yes, sir, that is exactly what I mean," quietly said Madeleine.

"Is the girl dreaming?" exclaimed M. Dubois. "Really, Madeleine, you make me utter things I have no mind to say. Do you know the price of that property you speak of buying?"

"Yes, sir," answered Madeleine; "I believe it is to be sold for about ten thousand francs."

"Well," observed M. Dubois, astonished at her composure, "where do you expect to find ten thousand francs?"

"God is good, sir," calmly said Madeleine. "All I wanted to learn from you was, how much the village of Mont-Saint-Jean could afford to give me; or

whether its inhabitants were willing to give me anything towards the buying of the property."

"Give you anything!" exclaimed M. Dubois, in utter amazement. "For my part, Madeleine, I would not give you one son for that purpose."

"Nay," indignantly said Madeleine, rising from her chair as she spoke; "all cannot have a spirit so poor and mean. Since it is so, however, I shall no longer appeal to you, but, if it is needful, to all Mont-Saint-Jean."

To see Madeleine angry was so unusual a sight that M. Dubois was pacified in an instant.

"Come, Madeleine," said he, good-naturedly, "we shall not part so. To show you that it is not through avarice I spoke thus, I now promise you a hundred francs provided you can only procure the remainder of the money. But just think, Madeleine, is that possible or likely? I am one of the richest men in Mont-Saint-Jean, and I will venture to say, none of the rest will give you so large a sum as that I have just promised; then what will you do?"

"Sir," answered Madeleine, "let the inhabitants of Mont-Saint-Jean give me what they can, and, with the help of God, I will find the rest in time."

"Yes," said the mayor, "when the property will have been bought and sold again."

"In that case I shall return the money, unless those who gave it choose to see it applied for the erection of another hospital. But I do not think the house on the hill will be sold so very soon. Who would buy it? It is not a country house for a rich man, and it is too dear for a poor one. Since the spring is worthless, no one who wishes to make money would think of purchasing it; and for what is the place so well suited as for an hospital?"

"Well, I believe you are right," said M. Dubois, struck with the practical clearness of Madeleine's arguments, "as to this point at least. The question is, how are you to get the ten thousand francs? I will do for you all I can; but I cannot give you

great hopes. I shall call together this evening the most wealthy men of Mont-Saint-Jean, and, if you are here at seven to explain to them your views yourself, you will be able to judge of your chance of success."

"Thank you, sir," calmly answered Madeleine, "I shall come."

At seven in the evening Madeleine accordingly made her appearance at the mairie. M. Dubois had kept his word, and summoned together those individuals whom he thought most likely to aid her in her plan. He had also told them his object in taking this step, and they had all declared that, though they might individually be willing to aid Madeleine, yet, as a body, they did not think it right to tender their assistance, the mere idea of buying the property on the hill being in itself absurd, when the price was taken into consideration. Though ten thousand francs was a very small sum indeed, considering the object in view, the capitalists of Mont-Saint-Jean looked upon it as an extravagant demand. Why, if this was to be given away for an hospital for the poor, what ought to be done for the rich?

With a penetration more natural than acquired, Madeleine saw at a glance how matters stood, and that, though she was received by the whole body with the greatest respect and kindness, they were each and collectively determined to give her nothing. Of this, however, she did not choose to appear conscious, and simply began stating, as a fact beyond dispute, that there was nothing of which Mont-Saint-Jean stood so much in need as an hospital. There was, at first, some inclination to contest this point; but Madeleine, appealing to the memory of all present for instances in the late calamity, soon succeeded in silencing her opponents.

"Well," said M. Dubois, who acted as speaker, "we agree to that. Mont-Saint-Jean wants an hospital; but how are we to get it?"

"You know what I said this morning, sir," an-

swered Madeleine. "The house on the hill is to be sold; I have looked over it to-day, and I find that it will answer admirably for the purpose. The price, I believe, all know: it is ten thousand francs."

These last words seemed to chill the whole assembly.

"How much of that money have you got?" asked M. Dubois, after a pause.

"Nothing," composedly answered Madeleine.

"Well," said the mayor, "I promised you a hundred francs this morning. I will keep to my word."

M. Dubois looked round as he spoke. He had hoped that this indirect appeal would produce something from those present; but they all remained cold and silent.

Madeleine looked round in her turn. "Is there no one here," said she, in her low, gentle voice, "who is willing to give something for the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean?"

There was a slight stir in the assembly.

"Madeleine," observed an old farmer, "you are a good girl, and we all love you, you must know that. Do not, therefore, think us hard if we give you nothing now; but ten thousand francs is too much for our means."

"I do not ask you for ten thousand francs," calmly answered Madeleine, "but for whatever you are able and willing to give."

The old man was disconcerted by this reply, but one of his companions quickly rejoined,

"We know that, Madeleine; but, as we cannot give you the whole sum——"

"You prefer giving me nothing," quietly said Madeleine.

The silence which followed these words was equivalent to an assent. Madeleine waited for a while to see if any one was willing to speak, but, as all remained silent, she turned towards M. Dubois and observed, "You promised me a hundred francs, sir."

"Well," said the mayor.

"When the time comes I shall bid you remember your word."

"So you persist in your plan of buying the house on the hill for an hospital!" exclaimed M. Dubois, with evident surprise.

"As to that particular house, sir," answered Madeleine, "I cannot tell; but, as for the hospital, there shall assuredly, with God's help, be one in Mont-Saint-Jean some day."

"But what can you do with a hundred francs?" urged the mayor.

"If I had a hundred times as much it would be enough," replied Madeleine.

All those present looked at one another with surprise; nothing was evidently farther from Madeleine's thoughts than to give up her plan.

"What can you do with a hundred francs, nevertheless?" said M. Dubois once more.

"I can say to myself every day that I have that much less to obtain than if I had nothing."

One of the individuals present, annoyed by this extraordinary persistency, here observed, "But how will you obtain the rest of the money?"

"How did God send me the hundred francs which I have just been promised by M. Dubois?"

"Then, I suppose," sharply remarked another individual, "you will say the people of Mont-Saint-Jean were too poor to pay for their own hospital?"

"Should I not rather say they were unwilling?" replied Madeleine, looking at him fixedly.

"Come," said the old farmer, who had been listening admiringly to Madeleine's replies for the last few minutes, "I see there is some truth in the proverb which says, that what a woman will do must be done; it was my firm intention to give you nothing, Madeleine, but since you are so determined I shall stand for fifty francs."

"Thank you, Mathurin," answered the young girl, "with M. Dubois' hundred, that will make a hundred and fifty francs."

"I will give thirty," said another.

"That makes a hundred and eighty," said Madeleine.

"And I give thirty more," exclaimed a voice.

"Then that will make two hundred and ten."

In short, every one promised to give something, until the whole amounted to five hundred francs.

"You see," said Madeleine, turning with a smile towards the individual who had asked her how she meant to obtain the rest of the money, "that, though I had only the one-hundredth of the sum a while back, God has already sent me five times as much."

"But, Madeleine," said M. Dubois, "you do not seem to me much more advanced than you were then; how can you get the nine thousand and five hundred francs which are still wanted?"

"I know not," replied Madeleine; "but did I know a short time ago how I should get the five hundred I have now?"

"Then you still persist in your plan?"

"Assuredly. A quarter of an hour ago I had not more than the one-hundredth portion of the sum, and now I have exactly the one-twentieth of it! This is not the time to give it up."

"You are a strange girl," said M. Dubois, shaking his head; but Madeleine only smiled.

Although she seemed satisfied with what she had received, the donors themselves felt that, considering the object to which it was to be applied, the sum was a miserably poor one. The old farmer looked at his companions, and read their meaning in their looks.

"Come," said h , "this will not do. We must loosen the strings of our purses a little more, were it only for the honour of Mont-Saint-Jean."

A universal assent followed this proposition.

Madcleine, seeing that a consultation was going to take place, and not wishing to impose any restraint upon it, silently withdrew into an inner room. In

about a quarter of an hour her presence was requested by the assembly. When she had taken her seat, the old farmer addressed her thus:—

“Madeleine, if any one had told us when we came here this evening, what we should do before we left the mairie, we should one and all have laughed at that person, for indeed our intention was to give you nothing; somehow or other, however, we agreed to let you have different sums, which, put together, amounted to five hundred francs. With this you seemed satisfied, and did not ask for more; but we all knew nevertheless that it was very little, and that we might as well have given you nothing. When you left the room, therefore, we consulted our means, and, recollecting that we were the richest men of Mont-Saint-Jean, and by this bound to do that which is out of the reach of poorer folks, we determined to bestow upon you such a sum that no one might accuse us of stinginess, even though it remained still far short of the ten thousand francs; each, therefore, according to his means, promised to give a certain sum, which Jean Renaud wrote down on a slip of paper, and the whole added together amounts to three thousand francs.”

“I can only thank you,” said Madeleine, looking round, “but the blessings of the poor will reward you one day.”

“Madeleine,” observed Mathurin, “you must not misunderstand our meaning; this money is given to you for the poor; let them thank you. We do not in the least conceive ourselves bound to give an hospital to Mont-Saint-Jean, though we should feel willing to lend our aid for such a purpose: we therefore give the money to you to dispose of according to your own wish, well knowing that whichever way it is spent it will benefit the poor. To you, Madeleine, we owe many obligations; for the last two years you have acted as few women ever acted in Mont-Saint-Jean before. You have fed and clothed the poor, you have waited on the aged and infirm like a dutiful

daughter; when the hand of God was heavy upon us, you were seen by every bed of sickness, and you have been a speaking example of good to our wives and daughters; it is, therefore, with a willing spirit that we give you those three thousand francs in order to aid you in a purpose which we all know lies near your heart. But, though we are not poor men, this is, you must feel, a large sum, and fully as much as we can afford to bestow; we therefore think it only right to warn you beforehand, that, no matter what happens, a liard more we cannot and will not give."

"I am satisfied with what I have received," replied Madeleine, "and once more I thank you."

"It is not all," continued Mathurin, "for Dubois has been thinking that the thousand francs which were collected by the commune to improve the dancing-place, and plant a row of trees in it, would be still better applied if given to you for the hospital; if the general consent be granted to this arrangement, you will have four thousand francs at your disposal; but how can you obtain the remaining six thousand?"

"God will give me the means."

"Well, but have you any plan of your own?"

"I have one," said Madeleine, with a smile; "but since you have trusted me thus far, allow me to act according to my own way, without questioning me."

"As you wish, Madeleine; whatever you do will surely be well done."

As the meeting now gave signs of breaking up, Madeleine, renewing her thanks, and bidding them all farewell, left the office. Until then she had laid her feelings under control, but now she could do so no longer. When she found herself alone, she raised her tearful eyes to the starry sky above her, fervently clasped her hands together, and exclaimed from the fulness of a heart overflowing with happiness, "The first step is won; my God, I thank thee!"

CHAPTER XV

ON returning home Madeleine found M. Bignon, and Marie Michon, with little Lise sleeping upon her knee, waiting to know the result of her application. She answered their eager questioning glances by a smile of happiness which could not be misunderstood.

"May God be praised for this!" exclaimed M. Bignon.

"I told you, sir, how it would be," observed Marie Michon, with a quiet smile of triumph. "What is there that Madeleine undertakes which she does not bring to a happy ending? But now, dear Madeleine, tell us everything about it; and, first of all, how much have you got?"

"Three, nay, perhaps, four thousand francs," replied Madeleine, who immediately related to them all that had passed at the mairie.

"Well, I am happy to hear this, very happy, Madeleine," observed M. Bignon, with a melancholy sigh; "and do you not think," he added, with a wistful look, "that he would have been happy to hear it too?"

"Indeed I do, sir," replied Madeleine, in a sorrowful tone. "I am sure that this news would have gladdened M. Morel's kind heart."

"Ay, he had a kind heart!" eagerly cried M. Bignon, his eyes glistening as he spoke; "else how could he have borne with me so long? Many thought him stern; but he was gentle, very gentle, Madeleine, was he not?"

"He was, sir."

"And good to the poor, and zealous in the discharge of his duties, as a priest of God should be," continued the *curé*, in a low, humble tone, as though he deprecated his own unworthiness. "His was a great loss, was it not, Madeleine?"

"A heavy loss, sir; but the will of God be done!"

"Amen! for, indeed, I am quite resigned, Madeleine, truly resigned, to the will of Heaven; it were a great sin not to be; he always said so. Ah, me! I shall never hear him say so again on earth! I shall never meet his kindly smile, not hear him call me brother, for we had been brought up together, Madeleine, in the same village, and in the same seminary. We were ordained on the same day, and since then no week ever passed without our meeting. We loved one another dearly! But you need not look at me so, Madeleine. I am resigned, I am, indeed," added M. Bignon, in a tremulous tone, and with a melancholy look, that gave a direct contradiction to his assertion. Madeleine's eyes filled with tears; but she thought less of M. Morel, deeply as she had regretted him, than of the gentle *curé* of Mont-Saint-Jean, who seemed unconscious how much his grief for the loss of his friend displayed the truth and holy simplicity of his own character. "Ay, ay," he remarked, misconstruing the cause of her emotion, "I know you loved him, and he loved you, too, for your name was the last on his lips; and we all have a right to weep and grieve for him—that is to say," observed M. Bignon, checking himself, and ingenuously looking at Madeleine, "we must not grieve too much—that would be flying in the face of Heaven. I hope you do not grieve too much, Madeleine: remember that he always preached resignation. Think how it would have pained him to see you committing such a sin! Promise me now that you will try and subdue your grief."

"Indeed I will try, sir."

M. Bignon seemed very much relieved by Madeleine's reply; but the feeling was only momentary, and he was relapsing into his usual melancholy, when Dame Ursula entered.

"Well, sir," she somewhat acrimoniously observed, "supper has been ready this half hour."

"I am coming, Ursula; but Antoinette had told me we should not sup till nine." For since the death of the *curé* of Puyseye, his housekeeper had been residing under M. Bignon's roof, to the infinite annoyance of Dame Ursula.

"Oh!" she bitterly rejoined, "I was not aware that Mademoiselle Antoinette had fixed a new hour for supper, otherwise I should not have presumed——"

"Ursula," gently interrupted her master, "let there be no strife between you, for his sake; she was a faithful servant to him, and he loved her."

Ursula could not withstand the appealing look which accompanied this speech. "I am sure, sir," she observed in a mollified tone, "that Mademoiselle Antoinette has no reason to complain of me."

"Then let this continue," replied M. Bignon. "Farewell, Madeleine; remember that it is our duty to be resigned; you will not forget it, will you?" he wistfully added.

"Indeed, sir, I shall not."

"I am glad of it," said the priest, with a sigh, as he followed his housekeeper out of the room.

"How strange!" observed Marie Michon, when he was gone. "M. Bignon seems to think that we all grieve for the death of M. Morel as he does; he asked me several times before you came in if I had got over my sorrow yet, and, though I told him I had, he scarcely seemed to believe me."

"He loved him much, very much," earnestly answered Madeleine.

"Marie says you love me very much," here interposed Lise, who had wakened up; "do you, indeed?"

"I love thee dearly," replied Madeleine, embracing her tenderly, "and, God help thee, poor child! if I did not love thee, who would?"

But little Lise only smiled childishly in her face, and soon fell asleep again upon her lap.

The good people of Mont-Saint-Jean were greatly astonished to learn, on the following day, that those

very individuals who had gone to the mairie with the firm intention of refusing Madeleine's request had ended by giving her three thousand francs; and yet, according to their own account of the transaction, she had employed no arts of oratory to make them alter their purpose—she had used neither flattery nor entreaty, the most approved methods of softening obdurate hearts; her sole support had been the pure and holy cause she advocated, a strong and unbending will, and a character which even the most reprobate pronounced admirable. With these she had conquered.

In the course of the week M. Dubois placed in Madeleine's hands the three thousand francs which had been promised to her, as well as the thousand which, instead of being applied to improve the village dancing-place, were now, with the general consent, given to her hospital. Great curiosity was felt, in the meantime, to know how she would procure the six thousand francs still wanting to make up the necessary sum. Some elucidation of the mystery was obtained on the following Sunday, when Madeleine was seen after each mass standing at the church door with a plate in her hand, and saying to those who came out, "Remember the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean, if you please."

The plan proved very successful; every one felt anxious to contribute to the village hospital, and those who could give nothing at the time, called in the evening with their humble offering. Madeleine thus collected about fifty francs; but she received several hints that the experiment would not bear repetition, and many people wondered aloud how she would get the five thousand nine hundred and fifty francs she still wanted. Though Madeleine gave them no satisfaction on this point, she seemed to be sufficiently confident in her own resources, for on the following day she went to the town of C—, where the notary who had been commissioned to sell the property resided. From him Madeleine learned that

the price of the house was not ten thousand francs, as she had supposed, but twelve thousand. At the same time M. Lacroix, the notary, informed her that the present possessors of the property might be induced to give it for a lesser sum in case they failed to sell it now; so that if Madeleine was willing to wait three months, she might, perhaps, then obtain the house for the ten thousand francs.

"Do you think, sir, the property will be sold before the three months are over?" hesitatingly asked Madeleine.

"It is indeed very likely, for several persons have been inquiring about it lately; still, you have a chance. Let me see, to-day is the 17th of September; well, then, call upon me after Christmas, and if the house is still unsold, I will give you a final answer."

Madeleine had no alternative but to submit, for the difference of two thousand francs was to her an enormous one, and with a sigh she declared her willingness to wait until the appointed time should have elapsed.

When Marie consoled with her on the subject of her disappointment, Madeleine calmly replied,

"If it is not the will of God that I should have that particular house, it is doubtless better for me not to have it."

On the following Sunday Madeleine, to the general surprise, did not appear at mass; many persons asked Marie Michon if her friend were ill, but she replied that she enjoyed good health, and was merely gone to Puysaye. On her return Madeleine made however no mystery of her errand; she had been to solicit the charity of the neighbouring village in favour of her hospital.

"How much did you get?" asked one individual.

"Seven francs."

The sum was thought very insignificant, but such was not Madeleine's opinion, "for," as she observed, "yesterday I had only four thousand and fifty francs, and to-day I have four thousand and fifty-seven; am I not therefore richer than I was?"

Though there was no contesting this, the remark

still was, "What is seven francs?" But to Madeleine every sum, however trifling, that brought her nearer to her great end seemed of inestimable value. She visited another village on the following Sunday, and this time her errand proved somewhat more productive; she brought home ten francs. Every Sunday she went to a different parish, and never came home empty handed. When she had explored all the villages within a few leagues of Mont-Saint-Jean, she resolved to extend her peregrinations, and accordingly borrowed the *cure's* mare every time that the distance was too considerable for her to walk. As Sunday was the most favourable day for such excursions, and the only one of which she could dispose freely, it was that which she always chose. In order to reach the place of her destination, sometimes ten or fifteen leagues distant, she was obliged to set out on her journey long before daylight. Her way generally lay through a wild and desolate-looking country, and often over rugged hills and mountain-passes, where she might travel for hours without meeting a human being; but Madeleine was accustomed to solitude, and the wild beauty of the surrounding scenery had a charm for her which the native of a more fertile and favoured region would vainly have sought to perceive. She always carried with her sufficient provisions for the day; her food was indeed of the simplest kind, but it satisfied the wants of nature, and she asked no more. When the day was fine, Madeleine sometimes took her repast on the margin of any clear stream that chanced to cross her path. A piece of bread, some fruit, and a drink of the water that rippled at her feet, formed her meal. The silence and loneliness of those journeys, which might have proved irksome to any other mind, were on the contrary congenial to that of Madeleine. She generally found her own thoughts sufficient company, but when these became dull she either took out her rosary or her prayer-book, or, oftener still, chanted one of her favourite ballads as she slowly went along.

Whilst the weather remained favourable, these

excursions, though fatiguing, were not attended with any unpleasant circumstances; but the severe cold which prevailed towards the beginning of winter rendered them very trying for Madeleine. Neither the fatigue she experienced nor the state of the weather could prevent her, however, from setting out every Sunday morning. Snow, wind, or rain seemed equally indifferent to her. It was in vain Marie earnestly besought her to stay at home, and that M. Bignon and Doctor Détrimont remonstrated with her; Madeleine persisted in her resolve, and to all they could urge merely replied, "I cannot help it; Mont-Saint-Jean must have an hospital."

Her journeys, were, however, more likely to prove prejudicial to her health in the end, than dangerous for the present. She now possessed a very accurate knowledge of the surrounding country, and always showed great prudence and coolness in difficulties. Notwithstanding her fragile form, she could bear a degree of exertion and fatigue from which even robust men might have shrunk, and through which she was supported by her energetic and ever-active mind.

Both Madeleine's person, and the object of her journeys, soon became well known by report within many leagues of Mont-Saint-Jean, owing to her perseverance in what she termed a holy and imperative duty. It was now a common sight to see her, even in the most boisterous and snowy winter days, riding along some steep and narrow path, which, though dangerous in appearance, was perfectly safe with the sure-footed Grise. Whenever some passing peasant happened to meet her quiet figure in this lonely region, the coarse cloth mantle which she wore made him immediately recognise her, if he did not know her previously, as "The Grey Cloak of the Hills," for such was the name which Madeleine had acquired in her peregrinations. Few of those who saw her thus proceeding on her errand of love, failed to gaze with mingled surprise and admiration on the simple

and thoughtful-looking girl, and all threw involuntary reverence into their usual greeting of "May the blessing of the Lord be on your path!"

"May it also rest upon yours!" was Madeleine's reply as she rode on.

The beginning of the month of December was marked by a heavy fall of snow, soon followed by a thaw, which rendered some of the paths along the hills particularly unsafe. Seeing the state of the weather, Marie Michon hoped that Madeleine might be induced to relinquish a journey to a distant village which she had projected for the following Sunday. But, in spite of the dark and threatening aspect of the sky, Madeleine persisted in her purpose.

Though Marie now understood her character too well to tease her with useless remonstrances, it was with a heavy heart that she saw her depart upon her journey at break of day. Madeleine averred that there was no danger, and promised to be back by the evening; but this did not dispel Marie's fears. During the whole of the day she could think of nothing save Madeleine, and the probable hour of her return. That hour passed, and her friend came not. Marie's heart sank within her. A thousand dismal imaginings crowded to her mind. What could have happened to Madeleine? And she thought with inward misgivings of the ravines treacherously covered with snow, and the swollen mountain-torrents which lay across the path of her friend. Night had long set in, and yet Madeleine did not make her appearance. Marie communicated her fears to M. Bignon; but the good *curé* could only share her distress of mind, without alleviating it.

The evening passed away without bringing any tidings of Madeleine. Many of the villagers who felt anxious about her called several times to learn whether she had returned; but Marie had no favourable news to impart, and only shook her head sadly when people wondered what could delay Madeleine so long.

"Why does she not come back?" repeatedly asked little Lise.

"Alas! I know not; I wish I did!" anxiously replied Marie; "I wish she would come back!"

Every one in the family naturally felt great anxiety on the subject; but old Joseph, perhaps on account of his infirmity, which kept him upstairs and prevented him from hearing all that passed below, showed himself most uneasy, and whenever Marie or any other person came near the room where he lay, eagerly asked if Madeleine were not yet returned. Towards nine o'clock it began to rain, and Marie's anxiety was increased by thinking how wet Madeleine would be. She sat up all night, in the hope that her friend would make her appearance, but, though she often strained her ear to catch the distant clatter of La Grise's hoofs, no sounds broke upon the silence of her watchings, save those of the mingled wind and rain as they beat against the casement. Unable to bear this suspense, Marie put on her cloak and went out into the silent street of the village; but the night was so dark that she could scarcely see before her, and she was soon obliged to retrace her steps.

Morning came at last; the rain still fell down in torrents; the day was dark and dreary. M. Bignon called at an early hour to know whether Madeleine had returned, and learned with evident pain that she had not. He was speaking on the subject with Marie when the door of the room opened, and Madeleine quietly entered. She seemed pale and fatigued, and her garments were dripping with the rain; but her look was so calm and composed that, though Marie at first started up with glad surprise, she merely observed, relinquishing her seat by the fireside, "Oh! Madeleine how wet you are! sit down here."

"You look pale," anxiously said her friend as she took the seat; "have you been uneasy, Marie?"

"Indeed, I have been very uneasy, and so has M. Bignon; we have all been uneasy."

"I am sorry for that," gravely replied Madeleine, "but indeed there was no danger, though the bad weather delayed me."

"I suppose you spent the night in the village where you were?" remarked M. Bignon.

"Oh, no! I left it as soon as mass was over."

"Then where did you sleep?" uneasily asked Marie.

"In a shed on the hills," composedly answered Madeleine.

"Oh! Madeleine, how you must have suffered from the cold!"

"Very little, I assure you, Marie; the night was so dark that I feared to proceed, and truly thankful did I feel when I perceived this shed at hand; I dismounted, led in La Grise, and remained there until dawn of day, when I resumed my journey,"

"Madeleine, Madeleine, you will kill yourself!" reproachfully exclaimed Marie.

"Indeed, my dear child," observed the *curé*, in a moved tone, "to spend a night like that, and in December too, in a wretched shed! You have acted very wrong. M. Morel, I am sure, would have highly disapproved of your conduct: think of that."

"Why, Madeleine," here interposed Marie, "I declare your clothes are all wet through; for the love of the blessed Virgin, go and change them instantly." Madeleine complied with this injunction, and left the room. As she passed by the door of the place where old Joseph was, he called her in. She entered.

"So you are come back," he observed, in his usual tone."

"Do you want me?" asked Madeleine.

"No, I want nothing," he briefly replied.

Madeleine was too much accustomed to Joseph's peculiarities to heed them; she accordingly showed

no surprise, but proceeded to her own room. In about a quarter of an hour she came down again. Marie Michon was preparing her breakfast, and seemed quite ready to question her on every detail of her journey. When her curiosity was fully satisfied, Marie, as though suddenly recollecting something she had forgotten, exclaimed,—

“But, Madeleine, you have not told us all this time how much money you got.”

“Here it is,” calmly said Madeleine, producing her pocket handkerchief, in which the little hoard was tied up.

Marie undid the knot; a few sous rolled on the table. Marie looked up at her friend, and her eyes filled with tears. Had Madeleine undertaken a weary journey through wind and rain, and passed a cold December night in a lonely shed on the hills, merely for this?

“It is not much,” remarked Madeleine, with a quiet smile; “but we must be thankful for whatever God sends us;” and, taking up the copper coins, she went to place them in the box where she kept the money destined for the hospital.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE three months appointed by the notary were now drawing to a close, and the house on the hill still remained unsold. Though she preserved her usually calm demeanour, Madeleine had experienced considerable anxiety on this subject; she never saw a well-dressed man in Mont-Saint-Jean without dreading in him some unknown purchaser of the spot which she longed to possess. Once her fears seemed on the point of being realised; a gentleman of property, pleased with the picturesque aspect of the place, took a fancy to it, and proceeded to C——, with the avowed intention of treating with the notary. Madeleine happened to be present whilst he looked over the house, for whenever she passed near it she could not resist the temptation of examining it again, to see how well adapted it was for her cherished purpose; but, on this occasion, she heard the stranger's expressions of admiration with a heavy heart. He praised the picturesque view afforded by the wretched cottages of Mont-Saint-Jean, as they rose on the hill, whilst she thought of all the misery they concealed; and, when he admired the manner in which the surrounding grounds were laid out, she sadly reflected that the produce of that land, now covered with shrubs and flowers, might almost suffice, if properly cultivated, to support her intended hospital. A week passed away, and to Madeleine's surprise the property remained unsold; at the end of that time she learned, with a strong feeling of relief, that, notwithstanding his great admiration of the place, the gentleman had never made his appearance in the *étude* of M. Lacroix.

One evening, about a week before Christmas, Ma-

deleine was spinning by the fireside, with Lise seated at her feet, and her children around her as usual, when Marie Michon, who had been out on some trifling errand, entered. She sat down near the fire in silence, then rose to look for her work, and sat down again without having found it. She seemed anxious to attract her friend's attention, but Madeleine was more than usually engrossed by her own thoughts; she had been counting over her hoard in her room, and was at the very moment wondering what sort of an agreement she ought to make with the notary. Seeing that Madeleine did not notice her, Marie at length observed, with as much calmness as she could assume, "That she supposed she had heard the news?"

"What news?" inquired Madeleine, suddenly awakening from her reverie, and fastening an anxious look on Marie.

Her friend evidently did not like to reply. Madeleine repeated her question.

"Why," hesitatingly observed Marie, "the place is sold; I suppose you know what I mean."

Madeleine knew well enough, for her cheek grew pale, and her voice quivered, as, after a brief pause, she said, "The will of God be done!"

Several persons came in during the course of the evening; they confirmed Marie's intelligence, and named the rich and titled lady who had purchased the property on the hill. Every one wondered at the composure with which Madeleine bore her disappointment; but, to say the truth, she was not so resigned as she appeared to be, and when, on retiring for the night, she at length found herself alone, the repining thoughts she had endeavoured to suppress till then could now scarcely be controlled. Her first act was to open the box which contained the funds destined for the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean. Besides the gold and notes which Madeleine had received from the villagers, all the silver, and even the

sous, which she had collected since then with so much toil and trouble, were here gathered together—four thousand four hundred and fifty-five francs in all. She had counted the sum over a few hours before, her heart beating with silent joy as she added to it a few francs from her own earnings; but she gazed upon it now with deep sadness; for Madeleine did not deceive herself, she knew that to erect an hospital of the most simple description would still cost a very large sum, and that if she could have purchased the property on the hill for ten thousand francs, it would have been an immense saving of time, money, and labour. But though, as she turned away from her melancholy contemplation, her heart was full of sadness, it was at the same time as much resigned to the will of heaven as human frailty would allow it to be.

Several weeks elapsed, and, as though nothing had occurred, Madeleine continued her Sunday excursions and her unwearied labour during the week; she had experienced a severe disappointment, but her faith was still unshaken. The hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean might not exist perhaps as soon as she had anticipated, but that it would exist one day she could not doubt. Every one wondered at this trait in her character, and many expressed their surprise that, though so simple and unassuming, Madeleine should still have such deep faith in herself.

One morning Marie Michon, who had gone out to see her brother's family, returned in a few minutes with a countenance so pregnant of news that Madeleine could not help asking her what was the matter.

"Oh! Madeleine!" exclaimed Marie, "if you did but know what I have to tell you!"

"What is it?" calmly inquired Madeleine.

"Oh! such news! But promise me you will neither be agitated nor—in short, anything!"

Madeleine looked up. Marie well knew the subject which lay nearest to her heart; could she be alluding to it now?

"What is it?" she again asked, but this time with a slight tremor in her voice, and keeping her anxious gaze fastened on Marie as she spoke.

"Then you must know—nay, Madeleine, I will not say another word if you look at me so; you must promise to be calm."

"I am quite calm, Marie, you may speak."

"What I have to say is about the house on the hill. You know that it was sold about a month ago to a rich lady of Paris."

"Then it is sold after all!" exclaimed Madeleine, who had begun to hope that such might not have been the case.

"Oh! yes, of course, but what do you think has happened? Why, M. Dupin's heirs and the lady have disagreed; she declares she has been taken in; and is so annoyed on the subject that she has commissioned M. Lacroix, the notary, to sell the whole property for ten thousand francs."

"Are you sure of this, Marie?" gravely asked Madeleine, unable at the same time to suppress her emotion.

"Of course I am sure of it; I met Pierre, who is just come from C——, where he saw the notary, who told him that if you still wished for it you might have the house now. But, how is this, Madeleine, your eyes are filled with tears: I thought you would be glad."

"Dost thou not see that I am happy, very happy?" replied Madeleine, with a smile sufficient to show the truth of her words.

The good tidings were immediately communicated to M. Bignon and the mayor, who both agreed that Madeleine ought now to see the notary with as little delay as possible, and expressed their readiness to accompany her to C——, which was accordingly effected on the following day.

After a good deal of debating, in which M. Dubois showed himself very zealous for Madeleine's interest, the notary, who had received great latitude from his

client, agreed to sell the property for nine thousand and five hundred francs. As Madeleine could not pay the whole of this sum at once, he consented to receive it in three different payments; the first, of four thousand five hundred francs, to take place on the present day, the twenty-seventh of January, of the year 18—; the second, of two thousand five hundred francs, was fixed for Midsummer Day; and the third, also of two thousand five hundred francs, for Saint Martin's Day, which falls on the eleventh of November. M. Lacroix, however, stipulated that Madeleine should not enter into possession of the property until the entire sum was in his hands; and that, moreover, if it was not paid within the appointed time, half of the money then in his possession should be forfeited. Madeleine raised no objection to the first clause, but the last evidently startled her.

"You know, sir," she said, anxiously looking at the notary, "that the money is not mine; that it belongs to the poor."

The notary, however, protested against any such knowledge; the name set down in the agreement was that of Madeleine Guérin, the poor were not mentioned once; it was with Madeleine Guérin he was dealing, and if she could not pay the money she owed, it was Madeleine Guérin who must suffer.

As, notwithstanding the politeness of his manner, he was quite inflexible on this point, Madeleine did not urge it further, but, turning towards the *curé* and the mayor, asked for their advice.

"Ah!" said M. Bignon, with a sigh, "what advice can I give you, Madeleine? There was one, indeed, who, were he living—but he is gone: may the holy will of God be done!"

"But what ought I to do, sir?" urged Madeleine.

M. Bignon took a pinch of snuff, remained silent for awhile, and, looking up, at length observed, with perfect sincerity and good faith,

"Madeleine, the best advice I can give you, is to

try and think how he would have told you to act on this occasion. You knew him well, Madeleine," he added, in a softened tone; "I dare say you will be able to imagine all he would have said, ay, and the very look with which he would have said it too."

When he had given Madeleine this piece of advice, M. Bignon shook his head, sighed, and fell into a fit of melancholy musing, as he always did whenever the conversation turned on his late friend.

Madeleine's look lingered awhile with gentle pity on the *curé's* abstracted countenance, and then turned inquiringly towards M. Dubois. This worthy personage had heard, with something very like a sneer of contempt, M. Bignon's advice, and on being now consulted by Madeleine in his turn, he drew himself up, assumed a consequential air, and, whilst the notary impatiently mended his pen, slowly began: "My dear Madeleine, the question is, whether you are to agree to this condition, or not. I believe that is the question," added M. Dubois, with a look of very great depth; "well then, let us examine it. If you do agree to this condition, Madeleine, you must reflect that it will be necessary to be able to pay the money within the appointed time, else you lose half of it; bear that in mind; do not forget it. If you do not agree to this condition, I believe M. Lacroix there will insist on your paying down all the money at once; mind that. Now, Madeleine, what are you to do? Are you to run the risk and perhaps lose half of the money, or will you act better, by giving up the bargain altogether? It is a nice question; I have stated both sides fairly, weigh it well. You have my advice; act upon it if you choose."

After having delivered this oration, M. Dubois sat down, wiped his forehead, and looked around him with a self-satisfied air. Madeleine had listened to both her advisers with great gravity, for she had naturally little turn for the ludicrous, and the circumstance which formed the subject of the present debate was, to her, far too serious to allow even a

smile at the expense of her kind-hearted, though not very clear-minded, friends. When M. Dubois had done speaking, she remained for a few minutes like one lost in thought, then rose, and, without uttering a word, walked to the table, took up a pen, and wrote her name at the bottom of the deed drawn up by the notary, and which only wanted her signature to render it valid.

When this decisive act was concluded, and the four thousand five hundred francs had been deposited in the hands of M. Lacroix, Madeleine left his study with her two friends.

"Well, Madeleine," said M. Dubois, as they proceeded homewards, "you have paid a large sum to-day, but how will you pay the five thousand francs still remaining?"

"God, who sent me the four thousand five hundred francs, will, perhaps, also send me the other five thousand," answered Madeleine.

The mayor shook his head sceptically; he was by no means inclined to believe in the frequent interposition of Providence, and on this occasion he could not help thinking that if Madeleine had not received four thousand francs from Mont-Saint-Jean, she could not have paid that sum to the notary a few minutes before. Had he spoken aloud, Madeleine would have told him, that in her belief whatever came through human means was still the gift of God; that she hoped for no miracle, but confined herself to the limits of what was possible, never leaving to Providence what she could possibly effect by earthly means, but at the same time keeping her faith unshaken and unchanged through every trial, for, though an open miracle might have confirmed it, it could not have rendered it more firm or more deeply rooted.

"Well," observed M. Dubois, after a short pause, "whatever may happen, Madeleine, remember that I gave you good advice." The worthy mayor did not say in what this advice consisted, and wisely abstained

from determining whether Madeleine had followed it or not, for, by leaving the matter in a kind of doubt, his credit as a prudent adviser would remain unshaken, however events might turn out. The word advice roused M. Bignon from his reverie.

"Yes, Madeleine," said he, interpreting it in his own way, "if you have acted as he would have advised, you need not fear, for, depend upon it, it was right. And yet, child, I wish I knew how you will get the money."

"We must leave that to God; He will take his own time, sir."

"Right again, Madeleine; he always said that we should leave everything to the will of Heaven."

Notwithstanding the evident uneasiness manifested by her two friends, Madeleine was perfectly calm. She was quite aware, however, of the risk she ran, but she also saw that it was unavoidable, that she could not have secured the property without incurring this risk, and that now the step was taken it would be useless and even wrong to allow her mind to be disturbed by vain doubts and fears. "And why should she fear?" urged that strong faith which dwelt within her; "a few months before she did not own a single franc for her hospital, and not an hour before she had parted with a large sum, destined to purchase the building. True, she might not obtain the money she still wanted by the same means, but could not God, after sending it in one way, now send it in another?"

Thus reasoned Madeleine, in her simple philosophy, as she returned with a light and happy heart to Mont-Saint-Jean.

CHAPTER XVII.

MADELEINE's life had hitherto been considered one of severe toil, but it was now generally pronounced actual slavery. She felt, indeed, that whilst appealing to the charity of others, her own endeavours ought not to be relaxed, but rather increased. To whom ought the cause of the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean to be so dear as to her? and, urged by this thought, Madeleine worked incessantly. Many pitied her, but she declared with truth that she had never been so happy as now.

Notwithstanding the severity of the weather, Madeleine persevered in her Sunday journeys during the whole of the winter. Once she was nearly lost in the snow, and another time narrowly escaped drowning as she crossed a mountain-torrent. But her deliverance from these dangers, the thought of which filled Marie with alarm, only confirmed Madeleine's faith and courage. When spring returned, her excursions became both more pleasant and profitable, for, this being the time when the rich leave Paris for their country residences, many of the ladies who attended the village churches made Madeleine very handsome donations, which in less than three months amounted to about five hundred francs. But Midsummer day was approaching, and Madeleine had still two thousand francs to procure. M. Bignon now came to her aid; he not only gave her fifty francs of his own money, but also, on her suggestion, wrote to several parish priests of the villages which were too far for her to visit, requesting them to solicit the aid of their parishioners in favour of the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean. About six hundred francs were thus obtained.

Matters were going on thus smoothly, when, towards the beginning of May, an event occurred which proved most unwelcome to Madeleine and M. Bignon; this was the death of La Grise, his faithful and serviceable mare. The good *curé* was chiefly grieved for Madeleine, for though, as he averred, La Grise had been the most intelligent and sure-footed of her species, he seldom put her powers to the test; "and now," he added, with a sigh, "that he no longer rode to Puyseye, he had little need of her services himself."

Marie Michon now knew Madeleine too well to think that this loss could induce her to discontinue her weekly journeys, yet she dreaded to question her on the subject; when she saw her, however, on a Friday evening making those preparations which she usually kept for the Saturday, she asked her the cause of this.

"Thou knowest," answered Madeleine, "that the loss of La Grise compels me now to manage as well as I can. It takes so much more time to walk than to ride, that, instead of leaving here on the Sunday, I must go on Saturday. Farmer Nicolas's wife is going to market to-morrow morning, and she has offered to take me on her horse as far as C——, which, though it leads me somewhat out of my way, spares me at least a walk of seven leagues. The distance from C—— to Cherson, where I am going, is about ten leagues; five I can walk to-morrow afternoon, and five on Sunday morning.

"And where will you sleep," anxiously asked Marie.

"I know not," composedly answered Madeleine, "but I shall probably find some place of shelter on my way."

"But, Madeleine," observed Marie, after a brief pause, "does it not strike you that you shall lose at least two days by this, and do you think that what you can get at Cherson will be worth the trouble you take?"

“There are rich people living there, I hear; besides, now that we have so little work to do, Marie, I do not risk much by going.”

Marie did not urge the point, nor did she remonstrate with Madeleine on the fatigue to which she was going to expose herself, for she knew that this consideration would produce little effect on her friend, though it rendered her uneasy and thoughtful for the whole of the evening.

The next morning, Madeleine set out at an early hour with Farmer Nicolas's wife, and arrived at C—— towards noon. Here she rested for about one or two hours, and then proceeded on her journey.

The day was lovely, though very warm; but her road fortunately lay through a cool and sequestered valley of considerable extent. When evening came on, Madeleine stopped at the door of a large farm, and asked to be allowed to pass the night in the cow-house. Her request was granted, and her quiet, modest manners so worked upon the heart, and also, perhaps, on the curiosity of the *fermière*, that she spontaneously invited her to join the family at supper. Here, of course, Madeleine was narrowly questioned as to her history, errand, &c. Nothing could exceed the surprise of the farmer and his wife when they learned that Madeleine was going to Cherson merely to make a collection in favour of an hospital, which would only be a burden to her even when she had accomplished her object. Her brief and simple answers, however, produced a favourable impression on her hostess, who declared that as she had a bed to spare, there was no necessity for Madeleine to sleep in the cowhouse, as had first been proposed.

Madeleine rose at dawn of day, and left the farm, not, however, without thanking the kind farmer, who assured her, that whenever she came that way she should always be a welcome guest. Madeleine arrived at Cherson a few minutes before mass began; she mingled with the congregation, and when the

service was over, took her stand at the door of the church, holding a small wooden plate in her hand, and uttering her usual petition, "Remember the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean." Most of the individuals who granted her request only dropped one or two sous each into the plate; and some, who evidently ranked as the great ones of Cherson, ostentatiously placed a silver half-franc piece amongst the plebeian coppers; a richly-dressed lady, who came out amongst the last, gave a two-franc piece. She gazed earnestly at Madeleine as she did so, and seemed on the point of addressing her, but a group which suddenly came between her and the object of her attention prevented her from doing so.

As soon as her collection was over, Madeleine, who felt completely exhausted through hunger and fatigue, hastened to leave Cherson, and to repair to a quiet and secluded spot which she had noticed in the morning. It was merely a little cluster of trees growing near a running brook, but affording a thick and grateful shade. Here she sat down, laved her hands, face, and wearied feet in the cool water, and, when her ablutions were over, took her frugal repast. She did not, however, resume her journey immediately, but waited until the heat of the day was partly past. Having then learned from a peasant the direction she should take—for as she did not intend to return through C——, her road was necessarily altered—she resumed her journey.

The heat of the day was still very great, and Madeleine felt it the more that she was already much fatigued, and that her road lay across fields, where she was fully exposed to the burning rays of the sun. After walking for about an hour, she reached a small but shady wood, where, tempted by the delightful coolness of the atmosphere, she sat down for a few minutes. She had not been there long, when the sound of many voices attracted her attention. Looking through the trees, she perceived a large party of ladies and gentlemen coming towards her. She rose,

and stepped on one side, but a lady who was considerably in advance of the rest perceived her, and, after looking at her for a few minutes, beckoned her to draw near. Madeleine complied, and recognised the donor of the two-franc piece.

"Did you not stand at the door of the church of Cherson this morning?" asked the lady.

"I did, madame."

"You were asking contributions for some hospital or other, were you not?"

"For that of Mont-Saint-Jean, madame."

"Where is Mont-Saint-Jean?"

Madeleine looked up with some surprise, but replied that it was a village in the hills, about seventeen leagues distant.

"And have you come all that way to make a collection in Cherson?" inquired the lady, with a wondering glance.

"Oh, yes! I am going back there now."

"How much did you get this morning?"

"Eight francs and five sous."

"That was very little."

"Oh, no, madame! I sometimes get much less."

"Sometimes! Then you are in the habit of travelling?"

"I do so every Sunday."

"How do you travel?"

"M. Bignon used to lend me his mare, but she died last week, so I shall now be obliged to walk."

"But is it to collect money for the hospital that you take these journeys?"

"Of course, madame," answered Madeleine, with a wondering smile; "for what else should I travel?"

The lady gazed with surprise on the slender and simple-looking peasant girl.

"What is your name?" she asked, after a brief pause.

"Madeleine Guérin, madame."

"Well, then, Madeleine, why do you take such an interest in the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean?"

"Because it is I who am to purchase the house which is to be the hospital," simply replied Madeleine.

"Then it does not exist yet?"

"Oh, no! but I have already paid four thousand five hundred francs to M. Lacroix, and I owe him five thousand more."

"But you must be rich, Madeleine, to be able to found an hospital?"

"Nay, madame, I have only what the goodness of God, my own labour, and the charity of the world can give me."

"Then, since you are not rich, how came you to think of so great an undertaking?"

"Because the poor wanted an hospital, madame; for no other reason."

"But how will you pay the five thousand francs which you say you still owe?"

"I shall collect part of the money as I did to-day; Marie Michon and I will try to earn the rest."

"My poor child," compassionately said the lady, "you will be very long before you have five thousand francs."

"I have already got upwards of eleven hundred and fifty francs, and the rest must be paid by next Saint Martin's day."

"Are you not afraid not to have the money in time?"

"God is good, madame."

The rest of the party now came up and looked with some curiosity upon Madeleine. The lady turned towards her friends, and briefly telling them who she was, made the young girl repeat her little history. This she did simply, but with a mixture of originality and *naïveté* which amused while it interested the listeners.

"And now," said the lady, when she had concluded, "what shall we do for this poor girl who came a distance of seventeen leagues to get eight

francs five sous for the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean ? ”

Without waiting for a reply she opened her richly-embroidered reticule, and, going round, smilingly bade every one remember the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean.

The appeal was very successful. All those present were rich, and the least each gave was five francs. Several dropped much larger sums into the bag; and Madeleine, who watched the proceedings with a beating heart, saw one gentleman give a Napoleon. When the lady had gone round, and contributed her own offering, she turned to Madeleine, and, bidding her sit down, poured the contents of the bag into her lap.

“ Let us count how much you have got,” she said, with a smile. The whole sum amounted to a hundred and fifty francs.

“ A hundred and fifty francs ! ” exclaimed Madeleine. “ Oh, madame, are you sure it is indeed so much ? ” And she looked at the glittering heap with glistening eyes and clasped hands.

“ Yes, Madeleine, it is indeed a hundred and fifty francs ; and I shall get you more money for your hospital, if you will only tell me where to send it.”

“ To M. Bignon, madame, if you will be so kind.”

“ Who is M. Bignon, and where does he live ? ” asked the lady, with a smile.

“ He is our *curé*, madame, and lives at Mont-Saint-Jean.”

“ Well, Madeleine, you must be fatigued. Will you stop with me for this day and rest yourself ? ”

“ You are very kind, madame ; but I promised Marie to return as soon as I could. She knows I shall have to walk home, and would think something happened to me if I delayed.”

“ Who is she, your sister ? ”

“ She is my friend, and lives with me.”

"Well, I will not keep you if it is so, Madeleine. Farewell; you shall hear from me again."

Madeleine, however, did not leave the spot—she wanted to make some acknowledgment to the lady and her friends who had so kindly assisted her; but she did not know how to do this.

"Madame," said she at length, "will you be kind enough to tell me your name?"

"Madame de Boissy. But why do you ask, Madeleine?"

"Because," replied Madeleine, "when the hospital is open I shall tell all the poor people in it to pray for Madame de Boissy and her friends. And perhaps you would like to know when it is open," she added, after a moment's reflection, "as well as messieurs et mesdames," she continued, hesitatingly glancing round on the company.

All protested nothing could give them greater pleasure than such an event. Madeleine's countenance brightened up, for she had no difficulty in believing this. Her own interest in the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean was so deep that it seemed natural every one should share in it. And who would not, she thought, be happy to hear of a home being opened to the sick and the poor? With much simplicity and good faith she therefore assured those present that she would not fail to let them know when the hospital was opened. This she repeated several times, as though desirous of impressing them with her sincerity; after which she bade the company farewell, and departed, wondering at the same time why they smiled and looked at one another.

Madeleine walked during the whole of the day, and spent the night at a quiet little inn on her way. She resumed her journey the following morning, and reached Mont-Saint-Jean towards dusk. Lise, who saw her coming, ran joyously to meet her, and informed her that Marie was sitting at the door waiting for her.

"Oh, Madeleine!" reproachfully exclaimed Marie,

when she drew near the house, "how tired you look! I am sure you have walked all the way home; and for what? for a few sous, perhaps."

Now was the time for Madeleine's quiet triumph; without making any reply, she displayed her little treasure to Marie's bewildered glance.

"And have you really brought back all this?" at length observed Marie. "Holy Virgin, here is a piece of gold! A hundred and fifty-eight francs in all! Ah, Madeleine, there is a charm about you, and that is why people give you so much!"

"Nay," returned Madeleine, with a smile, "it is to the poor they give. Who would not be glad to give to the poor?"

Marie shook her head sceptically. "I tell you, Madeleine," she insisted, "that it is to you the money is given; but I suppose you will never acknowledge that; so just tell me how you got so large a sum."

Madeleine told her, and related the few incidents of her journey. As she thought of Madeleine's success, and then of the fatigue she had endured, Marie was glad and sad by turns: but it was the latter feeling which predominated, in spite of the hundred and fifty-eight francs.

"She will kill herself," she sadly repeated, in a low tone, as she marked Madeleine's evident weariness, "she will kill herself with all this toil and fatigue."

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADAME DE BOISSY kept her word, and about three weeks after her meeting with Madeleine she forwarded to M. Bignon a sum of three hundred and fifty francs which she had collected for the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean. This proved a very welcome addition to Madeleine's board, for Midsummer day was approaching, and, in spite of her efforts, she feared she should not have the sum of two thousand five hundred francs by that time.

Her fears were realised; all she could put together was two thousand francs, and she had to impose upon herself numerous privations in order to effect so much. When she went to C—— with this sum, the notary was extremely dissatisfied, and declared that he exceeded his instructions in not insisting on the payment of the whole amount.

"But remember," he added, whilst giving the receipt for the money, "I must have three thousand francs for Saint Martin's day."

"And if I have not got the money then?" anxiously asked Madeleine.

"Well," replied M. Lacroix, seemingly astonished at the question, "you know the agreement between us; half of the money is to be forfeited."

Madeleine's heart sank within her. That money of which the notary spoke so lightly, but which it had cost her so much toil and trouble to put together, seemed to her like some holy treasure which it would be sacrilege to touch; but she remembered that the agreement did indeed give the notary the right to which he alluded, and she merely said,

"The will of God be done."

All the way home, however, Madeleine asked herself, "How shall I get three thousand francs by next November?"

Madeleine now began to think that she had acted rashly in taking upon herself a task above her strength. Everything seemed calculated to make her yield to discouragement; her pensioners became more helpless every day; the garden only yielded a scanty supply of vegetables, and little or no fruit, so that whatever she and Marie Michon could earn was barely sufficient to support the family. Notwithstanding the great labour and fatigue with which her Sunday excursions were attended, they ceased to be as productive as they had once been, for, as the fine weather passed away, the rich left the country, and the poor were getting rather tired of hearing about the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean. All that Madeleine had collected at the end of three months was three hundred and fifty francs, and in about six weeks more she would be called upon to pay three thousand!

After spending many sleepless and anxious nights in thinking on this subject, Madeleine resolved to appeal to the mayor of the village—no longer M. Dubois, for the office is elective—and request him to convene a general meeting of the inhabitants, who might, she thought, be willing to assist her in her present difficult position. It was not without strong reluctance that Madeleine determined on taking this step, but she sacrificed her feelings of pride to what she considered a holy duty. When she imparted her resolution to M. Bignon, and lamented the imprudence which had led her to incur such a risk as that which she now ran, he consoled her as well as he could, and failed not to assure her that if she had only acted as M. Morel would have advised her all would yet be right. M. Dubois, on the contrary, asserted that Madeleine's misfortunes proceeded merely from her disregard of the excellent counsel he gave her when the agreement was made. As to her pro-

posed plan of appealing to the commune, he predicted that it would prove a complete failure. Had he been mayor indeed!—but what could she expect from a poor ignorant man like farmer Mathurin, who now held the office, and whom the ungrateful Jean Renaud looked upon with as high reverence as that he had paid to his former superior. There was a good deal more in the same strain, for, as the ex-mayor had only recently been dispossessed of his high dignity, the subject still proved a sore one; but the end of it was, that he would be present at the meeting and promote Madeleine's cause as much as his present humbled state allowed.

Farmer Mathurin heard Madeleine's statement and request very favourably, but without holding out to her great hopes of success; Madeleine herself had none. But, as she observed to Marie before setting out for the meeting, it would have been a sin indeed to withhold from making this trial through pride.

When Madeleine entered the mairie she found that, besides the individuals who had presented her with the three thousand francs a year before, there were several other persons present. They all received her with a formality which boded no good. Seeing that they were in no hurry to learn the purpose which had brought her thither, she was the first to broach the subject.

"I am come," she quietly observed, "to speak about the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean.

These words were received in a chilling silence.

"It is now about a year," continued Madeleine, "since I received from you three thousand francs for the hospital; M. Dubois gave me a thousand more from the commune, which, with the five hundred I added myself, made four thousand five hundred francs. This sum I paid to the notary of C—— as part of the price of the house on the hill: the agreement drawn up between us was, that one-half of the sum remaining due should be paid at Midsummer, and the other half on Saint Martin's day.

In case of non-payment, half of the money in his hands was to be forfeited. Though many kind individuals have assisted me, all I could give M. Lacroix at Midsummer was two thousand francs. Of the three thousand francs which I am to pay on Saint Martin's day, that is to say in about six weeks, I have succeeded in collecting only three hundred. I therefore still want two thousand seven hundred francs. There is no hope of my being able to collect so large a sum in so short a time, and this is why I am here this evening to apply to you. I do not ask however, for a gift, for you have given me much already, but for a loan. I trust that, with the help of God, I shall be able to repay you if you will only grant me sufficient time."

Madeleine's address was heard in a dead silence; no one seemed willing to answer her appeal. Father Mathurin, at length observed, "Madeleine, we do not mean to hurt your feelings, nor do we intend reproaching you for the money we gave you, since it was given freely; but what have we to do with the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean? When we gave you the three thousand francs we warned you that we did not give them for the hospital, but to you, to apply as you thought fit; we also told you that, let what would happen, we would not give a liard more."

"I do not ask you to give me the money," said Madeleine, "but to lend it to me."

The old farmer shook his head. "If we were to lend it to you, when could you repay it? Not for several years, perhaps. If we had much ready money that might do; but our wealth is all in our land, and we would sooner give a small sum than lend a large one."

"Then," mournfully observed Madeleine, "you will neither lend nor give me anything for the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean?"

The silence which followed this question was a sufficient reply.

"However," said Madeleine, after a pause, "you will not perhaps refuse to give me advice on the course of conduct I should adopt, situated as I am now?"

One individual here observed, "that as they had not been consulted about the agreement into which Madeleine had entered with the notary, they could give her no advice on the subject."

Madeleine looked round to see if she could not meet with one sympathising countenance, but every eye was averted from hers; some of those present took snuff, others coughed, and many spoke to their nearest neighbour, as though indifferent to what was going on.

"God help me!" exclaimed Madeleine, with a slight degree of bitterness in her tone; "I came to you for assistance. I asked you not to give, but to lend me, the money I wanted. And why did I want that money? For an hospital, where, for all you know, your own children may one day find a home, rich as you are now. But you will neither give nor lend, and when I ask you for advice, you refuse even that. Well may I say, God help me and the poor sufferers of Mont-Saint-Jean! for man will do nothing for us."

"Of what do you complain, Madeleine?" here said one of the peasants. "Have we not already given you money, and has not everybody helped you?"

"I complain," replied Madeleine, looking at him fixedly, "not that you give me nothing, but that you all say, both in your hearts and aloud, 'What have we to do with the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean?'"

"Well, and what have we to do with it?" asked the peasant.

"What!" indignantly echoed Madeleine; "is the fate of the poor, of the poor of your own village, nothing to you? Think," she added, in a sorrowful tone, "of all they have to endure,—a life of toil and misery, wretched and starving children, and after

the long, wasting disease, a lonely death-bed; such is their fate! And yet you say that you have nothing to do with their hospital! Oh, though you neither give nor lend, say not at least that your hearts are so hardened against the poor!"

Madeleine ceased speaking, and looked round her. The same chilling silence prevailed; no one answered her appeal. She waited for a few minutes, hoping that some one might speak; but not a word was uttered. She looked once more at the cold faces near her, and her last hope vanished.

"Be it so," she sadly said; "I see the poor of Mont-Saint-Jean have nothing to hope from you. Their trust must henceforth be in God alone."

Madeleine rose and turned towards the door as she spoke thus. Though she would have wished to say something more before leaving the mairie, in order that those present might not imagine she parted from them with a feeling of ill-will, her heart was too full and sad for this, and she left the office without uttering another word. When she reached her house she found Marie, who was anxiously waiting for her return, on the threshold of the door. Madeleine shook her head in answer to the inquiring look of her friend.

"They will neither give nor lend me the money," she sadly said; "God help the poor of Mont-Saint-Jean!"

She sat down to her work as she spoke, and evidently strove in vain to be composed. Marie watched her from a remote corner of the room, and, as she saw her pale and anxious countenance by the light of the lamp, she wondered that she had not been struck before with the change produced in her friend's appearance during the last year. The toil and anxiety she had undergone had indeed greatly altered Madeleine, and made her look thin and careworn; the sleepless nights during which she had sat up to work had rendered her eyes sunken and dim, and changed the clear, healthy colour of her cheek

into a pale, sallow hue. The expression of her features had, however, always remained calm and cheerful, but even that was altered now. Marie could see that her courage sank beneath the trials she had to undergo, and she sadly watched the tears which slowly trickled down her cheeks.

"What is the matter with you, dear Madeleine?" said she, drawing near her.

Madeleine raised up her head, and endeavoured to smile; but she failed in the effort, and sadly replied, "My heart is sad and troubled, Marie."

"And why is it so?" asked her friend. "Have you not done everything you could do? Even if you fail, no blame can rest upon you."

"I have done too much," answered Madeleine; "I have been too confident. Think not that if I grieve now it is merely because I have failed in obtaining this sum. No, Marie; it is because, owing to my imprudence, half of the money of the poor will perhaps be forfeited in a few weeks. Indeed I have been much to blame."

Marie, grieved to see that Madeleine took this view of the question, vainly strove to comfort her.

"What!" she at length exclaimed, "is it you, Madeleine—you who have always spoken so cheerfully when every hope seemed gone—is it you who are now going to despair?"

"No, I do not despair," said Madeleine, looking up; "God forbid I should do so! for, even though half the money should be lost, yet half would still remain. But, Marie, if I did not feel any grief on the subject it would be scarcely human."

"But will you try and be resigned?" urged Marie.

"Yes, indeed I will," earnestly replied Madeleine.

"I know," she added, with one of those smiles which gave so striking a character to her features, by suddenly changing their expression, "I know that the cause of the poor will triumph one day, and

if I grieve it is because that day is now on the eve of being delayed through my rashness."

"Hist!" said Marie, "was not that a knock at the door?"

They both listened, and the knock was repeated. Marie went to open it; a boy of about ten years of age came in.

"What is the matter, Henri?" exclaimed Madeleine; "is your father worse?" for she knew the child's father, who was ill.

"No, Madeleine, thank you," he replied; "but as I was passing by the mairie M. Dubois, who was standing at the door, called to me, and bade me go directly to your house, to tell you that you were wanted immediately."

"Do you hear, Madeleine?" joyfully exclaimed Marie, "they want you. Well, what is the matter with you now? I declare you are quite pale and trembling."

"It is nothing," said Madeleine; "see, it is already passed. I am going directly, Henri."

In a few minutes Madeleine was at the door of the mairie, near which M. Dubois still stood. "Come in," said he, hurriedly, and without giving her any explanation.

Madeleine entered, and saw with some surprise that there were only three individuals present besides the mayor and M. Dubois; the rest had retired. After requesting her to be seated, and giving a preliminary cough, the mayor observed, "In order to explain to you, Madeleine, why we have asked you to come back, it is necessary to refer to the statement you made a while ago. You then said, that you should pay three thousand francs to the notary of C——, on the eleventh of next November, and that all you had of this sum was three hundred francs; the rest you asked us to lend to you. Am I correct?"

"You are," replied Madeleine.

"Well, then," continued the mayor, "to lend you so large a sum as two thousand seven hundred francs is out of our power; but, as we are willing to help you as much as we can, and feel that you, who labour for the general good, are entitled to such aid, I and the other persons whom you see here, five in all, have agreed to lend you the sum of a thousand francs: you will thus owe us two hundred francs each. But let not this debt make you feel uneasy, for if you do not pay us for ten years to come we shall not complain. We know that a thousand francs is not even half the sum you want; yet we cannot but think that the notary, seeing how anxious you are to satisfy him, and knowing to what purpose you wish to apply the property, will give you sufficient time to pay him. Nevertheless, now is the time for you to say whether you accept our offer or not."

"I do accept it," earnestly said Madeleine, rising as she spoke; "and I verily believe that God, whose hand is so visible in all this, will not allow the poor of Mont-Saint-Jean to suffer the punishment of my rashness and imprudence."

"Nay, Madeleine," observed the mayor, "let what will happen, we all know that you have acted for the best."

With this the meeting broke up, and Madeleine, after thanking separately the five individuals who had thus unexpectedly come to her aid, left the mairie with a light heart; for, though she had not gained her point in every respect, she now no longer felt either doubt or dismay.

CHAPTER XIX.

MADELEINE had now one thousand and three hundred francs in her possession ; but she still wanted a thousand and seven hundred more, and she was to procure this sum in less than six weeks.

"How will you get it?" frequently asked Marie Michon, in a doubtful tone ; and Madeleine, without answering the question, would fall into a deep fit of musing, which often lasted for hours.

Her weekly journeys were becoming less and less productive, though they had never been attended with so many hardships as now. Madeleine seldom walked the whole of the way, for every one in Mont-Saint-Jean was willing to assist her as much as possible ; but a ride of a few leagues could not relieve her from the fatigue of a long journey, nor free her from exposure to the broiling sun of noon, or the chilling breath of the night air. Marie saw with deep grief that the health of her friend was gradually sinking under the excess of fatigue she had to endure ; but Madeleine's only thought was of the means she she should adopt in order to meet the notary's demand.

She at length resolved on making what was to her a most painful sacrifice ; this was to sell her little cottage near the churchyard. She had often thought of doing so before, but had always delayed carrying her purpose into effect, still hoping to be able to keep the old place ; for, though she no longer dwelt in it, Madeleine's heart clung to the home of her dreamy youth ; that home where, in the surrounding solitude, she had first conceived the great thought of her life. But she now felt it her duty to listen no longer

to these feelings, and she inwardly chid herself for having put off the sacrifice so long.

When M. Dubois heard of her intention, he immediately proposed to become the purchaser of her little property; for, as he knew that Madeleine wanted the money, he concluded that he had now an excellent opportunity of making a good bargain, in the sense usually attached to that word. This by no means prevented the ex-mayor from having a regard for Madeleine, according to his own way, since he had lent her two hundred francs a few days before; but the temptation of securing the cottage and garden for a sum below their real value was perfectly irresistible. He therefore offered Madeleine seven hundred francs for her property, though he knew very well it was worth much more.

"Seven hundred francs!" sorrowfully said Madeleine; "and I shall still want a thousand! Ah, M. Dubois, that is very little!"

"I cannot help it, Madeleine," replied the ex-mayor. "You know how hard the summer has been for us all; indeed, since I have ceased to be mayor, matters have gone on from bad to worse. Farmer Mathurin is a good, honest man to be sure; but it requires something besides honesty to manage the affairs of a commune like Mont-Saint-Jean. There are fools of course ready to say that it was the weather made all the difference between this year and the last; but I ask you, Madeleine, what the weather has to do with government?"

"Perhaps you will be elected next year, sir," soothingly remarked Madeleine.

"Nay," replied M. Dubois, "I am not ambitious: I care little for honours or dignities. All I wish," he magnanimously added, "is, that the natives of Mont-Saint-Jean may not suffer the consequences which generally attend neglect of merit. As for that sneaking fellow, Jean Renaud!" he continued, in a wrathful tone—"but it always stirs my bile to think of him, so we will just talk once more of this little

affair of yours, Madeleine. I cannot afford to give more than seven hundred francs; for you see the house is old, and will have to be pulled down next spring."

"Must it indeed be pulled down?" asked Madeleine, in a tremulous tone.

"Oh, yes! besides the garden will require great alterations; the apple-trees in it are only fit to make firewood."

"Must they too be cut down?" said Madeleine.

"Of course they must; so you see I shall have a great deal to spend on the place altogether. To tell you the truth, I buy it chiefly to oblige you."

Madeleine's cheek grew pale and her lips quivered, as she heard of the proposed changes in the home of her youth, but she knew that the ex-mayor was, perhaps, the only individual who could purchase her little property at the present time, and, striving to think of nothing save the poor of Mont-Saint-Jean, she concluded the bargain, M. Dubois agreeing to give her a hundred francs more.

"Indeed," as he again observed, "he was actuated in all this by the desire of serving Madeleine, who, if not assisted by her friends, had little chance of success under the present weak and imbecile government which disgraced Mont-Saint-Jean;" and, after repeating this several times, he ended by believing in it himself, and took great pride in his philanthropy.

It was not without an inward pang that Madeleine delivered up the place, which had so long been her own, to its new proprietor. Whilst he explained to her all the alterations and improvements he meant to effect, she gazed with eyes which her tears made dim on every old familiar nook, and when she turned away after one last lingering glance, she exclaimed, in a low and broken tone,—

"I had thought to die here, but the will of God be done!"

M. Dubois, who was not very remarkable for penetration, saw nothing of Madeleine's emotion: few

persons indeed suspected how painful the sacrifice had been, and Marie Michon alone noticed the cloud of sadness which lingered for several days over the features of her friend.

Notwithstanding the sum which the sale of her house had brought her in, Madeleine still wanted nine hundred francs to complete the two thousand seven hundred she had to pay. As she was totally unable to procure this sum, she called upon the notary of C—— a week before Saint Martin's day, and, explaining to him the nature of her position, asked for a delay. The man of law shook his head. "It was impossible! he had already outstripped his instructions once, and all he could now do for Madeleine, whose case certainly interested him, would be to give her until the end of November to pay the money." Madeleine replied that, as she had no means of finding nine hundred francs in a few weeks, this delay would be of no use to her.

"Then what can I do for you?" asked M. Lacroix.

Madeleine remained silent for a few minutes, and at length observed: "If you will give me the address of the lady from whom I am purchasing the property, I will write to her myself, telling her how matters are; and surely, when she knows that the house is to be for the sick and the poor, she will grant me sufficient time to pay her."

To this request, which somewhat astonished him, the notary gave a peremptory refusal. "His client," he said, "had expressly desired to hear nothing more of the house, which had already been the source of much annoyance to her; he could not therefore think of complying with Madeleine's wish."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, sir," calmly said the young girl, rising from her seat; "for I fear I shall have some trouble in finding out where this lady lives."

"So you still think of writing to her!" exclaimed M. Lacroix, with evident surprise.

"Undoubtedly!" answered Madeleine, who seemed astonished in her turn that he should have thought her capable of giving up her plan.

"How will you do this?" he asked, after a brief pause.

"Oh! it will be more tedious than difficult," replied Madeleine, smiling. "M. Bignon knows where M. Dupin's son resides; I shall write to him: for, as he sold the house to the lady, he must know where she lives. I trust that he will be kind enough to answer me."

There was no defiance in Madeleine's tone, and as the notary gazed on her serene and ingenuous countenance, he perceived that she was merely bent on attaining a certain object for which she had asked his aid, which he refused to grant. Seeing this, she resolved to adopt another method, which she explained to him with a candour that showed she did not think there was anything in her pertinacity by which he ought to feel mortified or astonished. He saw that her plan would probably prove successful; and, reflecting that his client would feel more annoyed to have her place of residence revealed to Madeleine by a person with whom she was at variance than by himself, he ended by complying with the young girl's request. But as he handed her the slip of paper on which he had written down the lady's direction, he could not help observing to Madeleine, "You are a strange girl!"

Madeleine thanked him and smiled, but as she went home she wondered, in the simplicity of her heart, why it was that every one, from the *curé* to the notary, thought her so very strange.

The same day she began her letter to the lady on whose decision so much now depended. It was finished by the next morning, and she then showed it to M. Bignon, who declared that, with the exception of a few grammatical errors, there was nothing in the whole composition which he could alter, and that it only wanted therefore to be copied out. As this

letter was the first and last which Madeleine wrote during the whole course of her life, we will now lay it before the reader.

“To Madame de Meurice, 50, Rue de Varennes,
Faubourg Saint Germain, Paris.

“Madame,—This is to inform you that I am Madeleine Guérin of Mont-Saint-Jean, who, as you may know already, agreed a year ago to buy your house on the hill of our village for the sum of nine thousand five hundred francs, of which I then paid four thousand five hundred to M. Lacroix, the notary of C——, in presence of M. Dubois and M. Bignon. According to the agreement I was to pay two thousand five hundred francs at Midsummer, and as much more on Saint Martin’s day, which is still to come. At Midsummer time, however, I could give only two thousand francs to M. Lacroix, but I promised that the remaining three thousand should be paid this month. As I am still nine hundred francs short of the sum, and as I have no means of procuring it, I now apply to you for further delay; and I trust, madame, that when you know for whom the house is intended, you will be so good as to grant my request.

“It is not for myself, for I am single and do not mean to marry, and at all events should never want so large a house, but it is for the poor, the sick, the old, and the weary of Mont-Saint-Jean; and indeed, madam, if you have ever been in our village, you must know that we are poor—very poor. If such, therefore, were the will of God, I should wish it to become an hospital—a home for the poor. But, alas! how can I do this, if I have not time to pay you what I owe, for I have little or no money myself, and the six thousand five hundred francs which I paid to the notary of C—— had been almost all given to me by charitable persons. I know, madam, that I have been very imprudent, and that I ought not to have agreed to purchase your house without feeling quite sure of being able to pay you within the appointed time; but, alas! madam, you do not know how my

heart was set upon that house, because it was the best and cheapest that could be had in the whole village; besides, I really thought I should be able to pay the nine thousand five hundred francs within the year.

"Although I now ask you for a delay, I know, madam, that you have the right of refusing me this, and that, moreover, you are entitled to keep, according to the terms of our agreement, half of the six thousand five hundred francs now in the hands of M. Lacroix. But, indeed, I do not think you will do it, for is it not the money of the poor? and what need a rich lady like you care for such a sum? You must be kind enough to forgive me if I speak too plainly; but I am only an ignorant peasant girl, and all I know is, that the poor of Mont-Saint-Jean greatly want their hospital. Oh! your heart would be touched with pity and sorrow if you only saw half their misery! Then pray, madam, since they want their hospital so much, be kind enough not to exact the nine hundred francs on Saint Martin's day, but to give me till the spring, when I trust I shall be able to pay you. Indeed I believe, madam, that though you are a great lady, you will take pity on the poor, for, alas! who shall pity or relieve them if the rich do not? And if you do, madam, grant this request, you will make us all very happy. I am sure M. Dubois, the ex-mayor, will make a speech about it to the whole commune; and that M. Bignon, the *curé*, will say a mass for your welfare in this world and the next. As for myself and Marie Michon, I may safely say that we shall be almost too happy, for our anxiety on this subject has indeed been very great. But I am very foolish to speak thus to you; for surely, if you grant this request, it will not be for all the speeches M. Dubois can make, nor for all our poor villagers can say to your praise, but for the pure and holy love of God and of his children the poor.

"I have the honour, madam, to remain your humble servant,

"Nov. 18—."

"MADELEINE GUERIN."

When this letter had been posted at C——, Madeleine's mind was at first much relieved; but as the day on which she expected an answer drew near her anxiety naturally returned. The day passed, however, and no letter came: another day went by, and still there was no news. Madeleine began to fear that the lady had not received her letter, or, as this seemed scarcely likely, that she did not mean to return a favourable reply. Her anxiety became so strong at the end of a week that she went to C——, in order to learn from the notary whether he had received any instructions on the subject; but M. Lacroix had not heard from his client; and Madeleine returned to the village with the same load of doubt and anxiety on her mind.

Two days after this, as she was sitting down to supper with all her family, a peasant came in and handed her a letter, which M. Lacroix had received for her the same morning. Madeleine took the letter with a trembling hand, for she divined that it contained the tidings which were to decide whether Mont-Saint-Jean was to have an hospital or not. Her feelings seemed shared by every one present. Marie was pale and agitated, and the old people all paused in their meal in order to gaze upon Madeleine, who still held the letter unopened, as though she feared to become acquainted with its contents.

"I cannot read it yet," she exclaimed, in a broken tone; "I must pray for strength to bear the worst: I cannot read it yet!" and laying down the letter on the table, she clasped her hands fervently, and gazed on the small wooden crucifix suspended from the wall before her, whilst her lips moved in silent though heart-felt prayer.

Madeleine's orisons were soon over; she took up the letter once more, and, though Marie thought that she grew slightly pale, she broke the seal open without seeming hesitation. Every eye was now eagerly fixed on Madeleine, to read on her features the decision of the Parisian lady. She did not keep them

long in suspense. Her countenance was at first sad and troubled; but the smile which soon broke upon it told of such deep and holy rapture, that, though her eyes filled with tears, which she shook away to read on, there was not one present but knew that the request was granted. Madeleine, indeed, did not wait to read to the end, in order to tell them so.

"Children," said she, with her usual simplicity, "rejoice, and thank God for his goodness, for the rich lady, although I only asked her till spring, gives me until the summer to pay her the money."

These good tidings were received with great joy by every one, and the feeling was increased when Madeleine, having come to the end of her letter, informed them that the kind Parisian lady had remitted a hundred francs of the nine hundred still owing to her. The news soon spread over the village, and caused a great sensation. Every one was pleased that Madeleine should have succeeded in her object, though most people agreed with Maric Michon, "that it was not very astonishing after all; for what was there that Madeleine undertook which she did not succeed in accomplishing?"

Madeleine herself, though she attributed the merit solely to the holiness of her cause, could not help remarking, as she communicated her good fortune to the *cure*, "Indeed, sir, the hand of God is in all this!"

CHAPTER XX.

A HEAVY load of anxiety was now removed from Madeleine's mind; the doubt had passed away from her spirit, and, though she did not relax in her labours, they were carried on more cheerfully now that she saw the great end which they were destined to serve might perhaps be attained. Madeleine at first thought of writing to thank Madame de Meurice, but, before she had done so, she met the lady at the house of the notary of C——, and was thus enabled to tender her acknowledgments in person.

Madame de Meurice gazed with mingled interest and curiosity on the slender figure and thoughtful countenance of the simple peasant girl. She questioned her, and was surprised at the propriety of her answers. When she expressed to her the warm admiration which she felt for her noble and disinterested conduct, Madeleine heard her with quiet surprise, and calmly replied,

"You know, madam, that God sends us all on earth to do something for the good of our fellow-creatures; and I have heard M. Bignon, the *curé*, say, that the woman who marries and rears up her children in the love of God does more good than any other creature. But I was to be neither wife nor mother; then what could I do less than to try and have an hospital for Mont-Saint-Jean, which has needed one so long?"

Madame de Meurice looked at the earnest speaker with increased astonishment: but, though this utilitarian doctrine was novel to the rich and noble lady, and even grated harshly on her ear, she renewed the assurances she had already made to Madeleine, that she need be in no hurry to pay her the eight hundred

francs still due, and that she even requested her to apply to her for assistance in any of her difficulties. Madeleine thanked her warmly for her kindness, and, as she had now deposited in the hands of the notary the two thousand and one hundred francs in her possession, she departed; but, as she was leaving the notary's study, she could hear Madame de Meurice exclaim,

"This is the most singular girl I ever met with!"

Notwithstanding Madame de Meurice's assurances that she could take her own time to pay her, Madeleine worked so assiduously during the winter that her debt was nearly discharged by the following spring. When Marie urged her to take some rest, Madeleine replied that, as long as her task remained unfinished, she could not enjoy repose. "Besides," she added, in a thoughtful tone, "there will still be much to do when Madame de Meurice is paid, and life is short."

"But you are young, Madeleine," uneasily remarked Marie, "very young still."

Madeleine smiled and made no reply. But, though Marie dropped the subject, the words of Madeleine dwelt in her mind, and involuntarily recurred to her whenever she gazed on the slight and fragile form of her friend.

Towards the end of the month of May, Madeleine paid the last sum owing to Madame de Meurice, for she had regularly placed whatever money she collected in the hands of the notary. The day on which she discharged her debt was a solemn one for Madeleine. As she returned to Mont-Saint-Jean with her heart full of a deep and holy joy, she felt that the end of her being was almost fulfilled, and, though the thought was not unmingled with sadness, she welcomed it as the wearied traveller welcomes the goal of a long and trying journey.

"Yes, I am, indeed, happy," she said, in reply to a question of Marie; "the task for which I have been toiling three years is drawing to its close; the

poor of Mont-Saint-Jean will soon have their home. May the holy name of God be praised!"

"Then, since you have done so much, may you not take some rest now, dear Madeleine?"

"Repose! Nay, God forbid, Marie, that I should pause in my task. Oh! there is still much, very much, to do," she added, in a thoughtful tone.

Madeleine entered into possession of her new property, or, as she called it, of the hospital, on the same day. With the forethought and prudence which characterised her, she had obtained from Madame de Meurice during the winter the permission of cultivating the land, which already gave promise of a rich and abundant harvest. Though this arrangement had been both expensive and inconvenient at the time, the wisdom which had dictated it was already apparent. The house on the hill was not, however, yet in a state to be inhabited; the inside was still in an unfinished condition, and the roofing had got so much damaged during the winter as to stand in need of great repairs. Madeleine was preparing to begin her new task, with her usual activity, when Doctor Détrimont interfered, and declared that she stood in absolute want of repose; he assured her that her health had for some time been in a declining state, and that it was absolutely necessary he should examine into her case, and prescribe for her.

Madeleine submitted, and accordingly remained alone with him for about half an hour. When he left her room the doctor was eagerly accosted by Marie Michon, who anxiously asked him what was the matter with Madeleine.

"Take care of her, and do not let her fatigue herself," was his only reply. As he came out of the house several persons who knew the object of his errand, and were waiting for him outside, immediately gathered round him, and made the same inquiry, but M. Détrimont replied to, and perhaps evaded, their questioning by a display of his usual *brusquerie*, and rode off hastily without having given a direct answer.

But every one thought that, notwithstanding his roughness, there was a sad and troubled expression on the doctor's features.

"Ay, ay, depend upon it there is something the matter with Madeleine," was the general remark.

But Madeleine's replies soon dispelled the apprehensions which had been conceived; for, when questioned on the subject, she declared "that, save here," and she laid her hand upon her heart, she felt no pain, and that, though occasionally exhausted, the thought of the hospital soon gave her new strength. "Rest only wearies me," she added, even whilst submitting to Doctor Détrimont's injunctions.

In compliance with his orders, Madeleine now abstained from any active exertions, and gave up her Sunday journeys; but, as the doctor had recommended gentle exercise, she took daily walks, accompanied by Lise, who was now eight years old, and seldom left her adopted mother. Though the hospital was the place they usually visited, they wandered down one evening to the little lake described in our first chapter. Here Madeleine, who felt wearied, sat down on the same spot where four years before she had told Maurice that they should part. She remembered well every detail of what had passed between them that evening, but, though the remembrance might render her thoughtful, it could not fill her heart with sadness or repining. She knew that he was happy, and in her own lot she saw nothing to cause regret; far from it, she felt that to be the instrument of the holy task she had almost accomplished ought to be in itself a source of deep and holy joy, even though, like so many other labourers in the good cause, she should be called away when that holy task was done.

So absorbed was Madeleine in these thoughts that as she rose, and abstractedly followed Lise, she did not notice that the child was taking the path which led to the churchyard and to her former dwelling, until they had almost reached the end of it; she then

looked up and suddenly stopped short, with evident emotion.

"What is the matter, Madeleine?" asked Lise, looking at her friend with a wondering glance.

Madeleine made no reply; she was thinking of the house—now no longer her own—where she had spent so many happy years. Was it still standing? She knew not, for she had never questioned M. Dubois on the subject. It had probably been rebuilt, or, as the new owner styled it, improved. Madeleine's heart sank within her, but she felt this was an unworthy weakness, which should be overcome; she therefore calmly said to Lise, "Let us go on."

A few steps brought them to the end of the path, and, by turning the churchyard wall, they stood within sight of the house. Madeleine's heart beat with involuntary joy: it was still standing, and unchanged. A woman was hushing her child to sleep on the doorstep, where Madeleine had so often sat at her wheel; the wind sighed among the pines of the narrow churchyard, and the mountain torrent leapt down from the rocks: everything looked as of yore. Madeleine approached the woman, and, after exchanging with her the customary greeting of the country, expressed her surprise that the house should still be in the same state.

"Why you see," replied the woman, "M. Dubois thought it would scarcely be worth his while to have it rebuilt; the house is well enough as it is."

"Then you like to live here?" said Madeleine, in a tremulous tone.

"Nay, I cannot say I do; it is too lonely."

Madeleine made no reply; but bidding the woman farewell, she gave another look over every familiar spot, and turned away with Lise.

"Wouldst thou like to live there?" she asked of the child, after they had been walking for some time.

"No, Madeleine, I should not, it looks such a silent, solitary place."

"How strange," thoughtfully observed Madeleine, "every one finds it so, and yet to me Mont-Saint-Jean seems far more lonely."

"How is that, Madeleine? there are people in Mont-Saint-Jean; but no one lives here save those who dwell in the cottage."

"Ay, child; but to be alone with God and our own thoughts is not solitude."

But little Lise neither heeded nor understood the purport of this reply, and Madeleine returned to Mont-Saint-Jean without renewing the subject.

Although she scrupulously obeyed the doctor's injunctions, Madeleine did not seem to grow better; on the contrary, after a month of inactivity, she looked so pale and feeble that M. Détrimont, in order to try the effect of change, set her at liberty to act as she pleased; she accordingly resumed her usual occupations, and a decided improvement in her health and appearance was the consequence of this step. Marie Michon, seeing how well she looked, asked the doctor if he did not think Madeleine cured, but he shook his head in token of doubt or dissent. Although he saw that, as long as her mind was bent on her great aim, it would be useless to recommend repose, since, as she truly said, it only wearied her, M. Détrimont insisted that the weekly journeys should be entirely given up. Madeleine submitted to this injunction, which the *curé* supported with all his authority, by assuring her that M. Morel would have greatly disapproved of her undergoing such excessive fatigue.

It was not until after the harvest that Madeleine had any funds at her disposal; she was then mistress of five hundred francs, part of which proceeded from her own earnings during the summer. She immediately went to C——, and there secured the services of a contractor, who engaged to finish the house on the hill, as well as to make all the necessary alterations. When he spoke of terms, Madeleine placed her five hundred francs in his hands, and told him to pay himself and his men out of this sum as long as

it would last, and bade him apply to her for more money when it was exhausted. "I will not ask you," she added, "to deal justly by me, for it is not for me you are working, but for the poor."

When the nature of this agreement was known in Mont-Saint-Jean, almost every one declared that Madeleine had acted with great imprudence, and would certainly be deceived by the contractor. But Madeleine, who had faith not merely in Providence, but also in human nature, could not be made to believe this. "Surely," she observed, "no man would commit such a sin as to rob the poor!"

The event showed that her confidence had not been misplaced, for, though the contractor did not bear the reputation of being very scrupulous in ordinary matters, he made it in this case a point of honour to charge no more than what was justly due to him, to the great astonishment of the village prophets. It was not long, however, before he declared to Madeleine that the five hundred francs were spent; she gave him a little sum which she had saved up in the meanwhile, but that only lasted a few days, and the house was still unfinished. One morning, when she went as usual to see how the work progressed, the contractor took her aside, and reminded her that he had no more money.

"Alas!" sadly replied Madeleine, "it grieves me to hear you say so, Master Jerome, for I have none to give you."

Jerome expressed his concern, "but what could he do? he was not rich, and, happen what would, his men would be paid."

"I suppose I must give the order to stop the works," sorrowfully said Madeleine; "and, as winter is coming on, the hospital must wait until next year to be finished."

But when she had once more gone over the whole place, and when she saw how little, comparatively speaking, there was to do to it she could not resign

herself to the delay which seemed inevitable. The workmen were then engaged in taking their lunch; Madeleine suddenly resolved to appeal to them for aid, and, stepping within the circle which they formed, she addressed them thus:—

“Children, I want to speak to you.” Seeing that these words had created a general silence, she continued: “You have now been several months engaged in finishing this, the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean; you have been paid for your labour; yet it was holy work, since whatever is done for the poor is also done for God. Now, I recollect hearing M. Bignon say, that many hundred years ago, when there were not so many churches in the land as there are now, it was a common thing, whenever a large cathedral was built, for the masons and other working men to give some of their time for the love of God. I grieve to say, that, though I have been able to pay you until now, my money is all spent, and that, unless you help me, the hospital must remain unfinished until next year. I know that you are poor men, and that you have to provide the bread of your children from your earnings, yet take it not ill that I ask you to do something for those who have neither strength nor health to work—the sick and the aged.”

Madeleine concluded her little speech in a low and tremulous tone, which rendered it more impressive. The workmen looked at one another, then consulted in whispers; one of them, acting as speaker, at length observed:

“Mademoiselle Madeleine,” for they all gave her this remark of respect, contrary to the simple customs of the country, “we are indeed but poor working men, yet such as we are we wish to help you, and, though we may do little, it shall be done with a cheerful heart, for if men formerly laboured for nothing to build the house of God, we can at least help to finish the house of the poor. This therefore we

can promise you, namely, that every man amongst us will give you one day's work for nothing, and credit for another."

"May Heaven reward you all!" fervently exclaimed Madeleine, "and may the blessings of the poor rest on you till your dying day!"

"Nay, but I will have nothing to do with this working for nothing and giving credit," surlily observed one of the men, whom Madeleine's eye immediately singled out from the rest as a disagreeable and discontented man, disliked by his companions, who called him "gloomy Pierre."

"You are free," she gently said; "but though you will not, or perhaps cannot, work for nothing, like your comrades, yet I trust that you will stay and receive your wages as usual."

Pierre eyed Madeleine fixedly, then turned away his look, and muttered something about having seven starving children at home, and every one looking to himself and to his own.

Master Jerome had witnessed with great astonishment the effect which Madeleine had produced upon his men, of whose disinterestedness he had no very exalted opinion. But there are nobler springs of action in the human heart than many wot of, and of which men like the contractor live and die in ignorance.

After once more expressing her thanks to the kind-hearted workmen, Madeleine turned away to depart. In a retired spot, seated on the fallen trunk of a tree, at a distance from his comrades, whose indignant glances had testified their contempt of his selfish spirit, she perceived gloomy Pierre finishing his meal. A lean and half-starved looking dog, attracted by the smell of food, loitered near him. The man kicked him brutally, and the cur fled yelping away. An indignant exclamation rose to the lips of Madeleine, who had a tender and compassionate feeling for every living creature: but she knew that an angry reproof, uttered for the gratification of per-

sonal feelings, seldom has the improvement of the offender for its object, and she gently said,—

“Why did you hurt the poor dog?”

The man turned round and eyed her askance: “Why did he want my food?”

“Perhaps he was hungry.”

“Then let him work like a Christian, since Christians now fare like dogs,” was the bitter reply.

“To work for our daily bread is God’s own law,” gravely observed Madeleine: “all must work.”

“Ay, but all do not work,” sarcastically said Pierre; “look at the rich!” and he laughed a bitter laugh, which reminded Madeleine of the dying widow of the eastern hill. “You hate the rich; do you not?” he continued, after a brief pause.

“Hate them! God forbid!”

“I do not believe you; I hate them, and so do all the poor, in their hearts.”

“God is all love,” earnestly said Madeleine, “it is therefore a deadly sin to hate.”

“I love nothing,” harshly replied Pierre.

“What, not even your own children?”

“No, why should I love them? I kill myself with work to give them bread, and yet they always seem to be starving. There are two or three of them now lying ill with the measles; my wife says it will be a blessing if they go to heaven; if she says so, who loves them, I may say so too, since I do not.” And Pierre whistled a tune with reckless gaiety. Madeleine shrank from him with horror, but a look at the convulsive workings of his face showed her that this was only a mask put on to hide, and perhaps to check, deeper feelings, and she drew near again. Nor was the wish he had expressed new to her, for often, with a sickening heart, she had heard parents hail as a blessing the death of some innocent and even beloved child; not from the devout hope that it had been removed from a world of sin and suffering to everlasting bliss, but because its removal

would lessen the heavy burthen of supporting their surviving offspring.

"Alas!" she sorrowfully exclaimed, gazing on Pierre's features, where reckless mirth and harrowing anxiety were strangely blended, "May God help the poor, for sad indeed is their lot upon earth!"

Pierre raised his eyes; he saw Madeleine standing by his side, and looking down upon him with that glance of gentle and infinite pity which Catholic painters delight in giving to the Virgin Mother of God, and, though the simple peasant girl had none of the unearthly beauty of a Madonna, a vague sense of the likeness perhaps came to his soul, and impressed him with the reverence due to holy things, or he might have been moved by the boundless compassion of that mild look; whatever was the cause, he rose and hurriedly turned away, but Madeleine could see that his heart was softened within him.

The workmen, who all felt anxious to impress Madeleine with the sincerity of their wish to serve her, used such extraordinary diligence in their task that it was completely finished at the end of four days. On the evening of the last day Madeleine paid them for two days of their labour, one day remaining due, according to the agreement. Pierre alone received his full salary. As they were all to go off at an early hour the next morning, Madeleine bade them farewell whilst acquitting her debt, and renewing, as she did so, her thanks for the aid they had afforded her: "Without you," she added, pointing to the hospital, now completely finished, "this home for the poor must have remained useless for many months; but now it is ready for them, and the blessing of God will surely be with you for this."

"Mademoiselle Madeleine," observed one of the men "we all know that you are a good and noble being, and shall always be proud to think that we assisted you, though it was very little, in finishing the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean. May you live in it many years!"

"I thank you one and all for the wish," replied Madeleine, with a smile, which though sweet was not without a tinge of sadness.

She bade them once more farewell, and left the spot; she had not gone far before she perceived gloomy Pierre sitting in the same place and attitude in which she had found him a few days before. Notwithstanding all her efforts since then to induce him to cast off his misanthropy, he had preserved his churlishness of manner. This did not prevent Madeleine from approaching him now, and asking him if he had heard from his children.

"The youngest is dead," he answered, in a husky tone, and he turned his head away.

Madeleine sat down near him, and, without endeavouring to administer premature consolation, spoke to him gently and soothingly. For some time he resisted her efforts to make him disburthen himself of his grief, but he secretly longed to yield, and at length, without solicitation, related his whole history; one of toil, pain, and misery, which forcibly reminded the listener of the widow Jeanne's narrative.

Madeleine possessed little skill in the art of offering consolation, for her chief arguments were: "It is the will of God; let us bear it patiently, and hope; for," added she, with one of her own smiles, "does it not show the infinite goodness of God to man that He should have made a virtue of hope?" But the faith and earnestness of her simple exhortations gave them a power in which more elaborate and logical reasoning might have been deficient.

"Mademoiselle Madeleine," said Pierre, in reply to her gentle attempts at consolation, "I know not how it is, but, though I think I have heard all you tell me before now, it makes my heart lighter to hear it again from your lips. Perhaps you will not take it amiss if I call upon you whenever I come round this way?"

"Assuredly not," answered Madeleine, "you shall

always be welcome in the hospital which you have helped to erect."

"I have been paid for my labour," replied Pierre; "since we come to speak of this, I wish you would take back half of the money. I know that you must have despised me, like the rest, but indeed poverty hardens the heart."

But Madeleine would not hear of this; she told him it would be a great sin to deprive him of the money which was to give bread to his children, and Pierre at length yielded to her representations. As the dews of evening were now beginning to fall, she rose from the seat she had taken near him and bade him farewell.

"Be more sociable, and mingle more with your companions, Pierre," she urged, as they were separating. But Pierre shook his head, as though this were an effort to which he did not yet feel equal, and, bidding her an abrupt farewell, he turned away.

The sight of wretchedness, under whatever form it offered itself, always grieved Madeleine. As she slowly walked home she thought of Pierre's fate, and it filled her heart with sadness. It was that of thousands, she knew; and then came the thought of how trifling an amount of misery would be relieved by the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean.

"Yet, if a few beings are less unhappy, shall I have toiled in vain?" asked Madeleine of herself, and the reply of the inward voice told her, "No labour of love and charity can be in vain."

"Well, Madeleine," said Marie to her friend, as she entered the house, "your hospital is finished; are you happy now?"

"Yes, I am happy," said Madeleine, looking up, "very happy, for my task is almost done."

She uttered these words in a tone of such deep and solemn joy that it affected Marie, and rendered her sad and thoughtful during the whole evening.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean was now finished, and every one hailed the event, and congratulated Madeleine with the most unfeigned joy. M. Dubois who had been re-elected mayor, and was once more in possession of all his honours, took great pride in her success, which, as he often hinted, might not have been so complete under a different government. M. Bignon was glad that Madeleine should have brought her long task so near its close ; but his gladness was not unmingled with regret.

"He would have been glad to see it, would he not, Madeleine ?" he asked, looking at her earnestly.

"Yes, sir, I believe he would," answered Madeleine, in a moved tone ; "M. Morel took great interest in the hospital."

"Ay, he did," said M. Bignon, with a deep sigh ; "but we must be resigned, Madeleine. I hope you are resigned. I know it is difficult ; yet you see how I bear it—and yet I loved him like a brother," he added, in a low and tremulous voice.

Here Madeleine, noticing his emotion, of which he was himself unconscious, changed the subject of conversation.

Though the hospital was finished, it still required to be furnished ; but Madeleine declared that she could not think of seeing to this whilst the workmen remained unpaid, and both she and Marie Michon laboured almost day and night until this desirable object had been effected. When it was known, however, that the men had received the money due to them, every one in the village was anxious to learn from Madeleine when and how the hospital would be furnished.

"I know not," was her reply ; and, though it was such as might have been expected, it created a general feeling of disappointment. The people of Mont-Saint-Jean wished to believe that Madeleine could do what she liked, and possessed resources peculiar to herself.

Madeleine knew, however, that to fit up the hospital properly would take a great deal of money, and that it would consequently be unwise to fix an epoch still unknown to her. But, though she said nothing on the subject, Marie Michon could see that it was one which was seldom absent from her thoughts.

Towards the beginning of the winter old Joseph became very ill, and M. Détrimont soon declared that no hope of his recovery could be entertained.

The old man showed no fear of death, for which he prepared with great calmness, receiving M. Bignon's exhortation, if not with fervent piety at least with a becoming spirit. Madeleine attended on him, as she always did whenever any of her pensioners were ill, with the greatest care and tenderness. To her surprise, far from receiving her attentions with the moroseness which he had always displayed, Joseph now seemed sincerely grateful for whatever she did. He could even scarcely bear her to be out of his sight, and never appeared happy or at ease unless when she remained in the room. Yet, when she complied with his wish, he seldom addressed her—her presence seemed enough for him. Perhaps he guessed that this sudden change of behaviour was likely to create some wonder in Madeleine, for once or twice during the course of his illness she met his glance fixed upon her with a singular expression, whilst he muttered to himself,—

"She has thought me harsh and ungrateful, but she shall see—she shall see."

When Joseph felt at length, from his increasing weakness, that he had only a few hours more to live, he requested to see his children, who, on Madeleine's urgent message, immediately made their appearance,

and, gathering round the bed of their father, inquired, "How he felt now?"

But, to Madeleine's surprise, the old man took no other notice of them than to bid them harshly not to come so near him; after which he earnestly asked that M. Dubois and the priest might be sent for. When this request had been complied with, he looked around him, as though to feel sure that every one he wanted was present, after which, gathering his failing strength, he observed, in a firm voice,—

"M. Dubois, will you be kind enough to lift up my pillow, and take away what you will find underneath it?"

The mayor obeyed, and drew forth a large leathern purse tolerably well filled. Every one looked with surprise on his neighbour, and Madeleine was not the least astonished of any.

"Open it, and count the silver in the larger end of the two," continued Joseph, without seeming to notice either the general surprise or that of his children, who had long thought him penniless. The mayor counted the money, which amounted to a hundred and ten francs, in five-franc pieces. "That is correct," said the old man: "now count the gold at the other end."

M. Dubois obeyed, and found twenty gold pieces, or four hundred francs—in all five hundred and ten francs, which Joseph said was the exact amount contained in the purse.

"I suppose," observed M. Dubois, "you wish to bequeath this money to some one; perhaps to your eldest son, Mathieu?"

"No," almost fiercely, replied the old man, "not to him! but I call you all to witness that of this money I bequeath two gold pieces to Marie Michon, for her kindness to me during several years."

"And the rest, I suppose, goes to Madeleine?" exclaimed Mathieu, with a malignant scowl.

"To Madeleine," replied his father, eyeing him sternly, "I leave—nothing."

There was a general feeling of surprise, but Madeleine alone remained calm and unmoved.

"Then to whom do you leave it, father dear?" exclaimed one of his daughters, eagerly drawing near him—"to whom do you leave it?"

"To the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean," answered Joseph, without looking on his daughter, who drew away, biting her lip. "I call you all to witness," continued the sick man, looking round him and speaking in a firm tone, "that I leave this money to the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean, and that I do not entrust it to the care of Madeleine, but to that of M. Bignon, the *curé*. M. Dubois, hand him over the purse, if you please."

"Nay," interposed the priest, "be not too hasty, my friend; think of your children."

"I do think of them, sir," replied the old man, with a stern smile, "and of the day when they sent their old father to trust to the mercy of the stranger. Little did they think then that they sent his gold and his silver away with him too; to them I leave—nothing."

Mathieu, exasperated by this speech, could not restrain himself, but, in an under-tone, muttered something about having the money when the old fool was dead. His father heard him, and giving him a look from which the man shrank, said, in a solemn tone, "Ye have heard him! Hear me now: if he or any other of those who call themselves my children dare so much as claim a five-franc piece of this money when I am gone, may my curse rest upon them."

"This is no Christian spirit," gravely remarked M. Bignon.

"Nay," replied the old man, "I will do with my own as I list; and I repeat it again, two gold pieces I give to Marie Michon, and the rest to the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean."

"But surely you will bless your children?" urged the priest.

"They have both my blessing and my forgiveness,"

said Joseph, with a bitter smile, which showed how well he knew the value they were likely to set on gifts so unsubstantial, "but of my money not one liard. I have said it. Now let M. Dubois give the purse to M. Bignon, and let every one, save him and Madeleine leave me, that I may die in peace."

The request was complied with. Old Joseph's children departed with a bitter mortification, which they vainly strove to conceal, whilst their father was left alone with Madeleine and M. Bignon.

"Madeleine," said the old man, looking kindly on her, and speaking in a gentle tone, "you are not angry with me, are you?"

"Why should I be angry with you, Joseph."

"I did not leave you the money," he continued, following his own train of thought, "because I know them and their malice too well; they would have allowed you no rest; but I left it to the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean, which is dearer to you than anything else on earth. I would not, however, let the money be in your hands, for with that too they would have found fault; but if the *cure* has the managing of it, I know they dare not murmur; and though they may not care for my curse," he added, in a sorrowful tone, "yet very shame will not allow them to complain too loud after what has passed. Now, Madeleine, that I have explained everything to you, leave me awhile alone with M. Bignon."

Madeleine left the room, but soon returned, for the old man felt himself dying. In compliance with his request, she sat down by his bedside, and gave him her hand. He muttered in a low tone, "Tell them, Madeleine, that I forgave them;" then placed her hand upon his eyes, which were soon closed in their eternal slumber.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE money left by old Joseph proved of the greatest service to Madeleine, for M. Bignon, who considered his trust to be merely nominal, immediately placed it at her disposal, and Marie Michon positively refused to accept of the little sum left her by the deceased. Madeleine thus found herself in possession of five hundred and ten francs, which were speedily applied to the purchase of bedsteads, linen, and bedding. Whatever she could spare from her earnings was indeed devoted to the purpose of furnishing the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean, as well as a hundred and fifty francs which she received from Madame de Meurice. Owing to her active exertions, the hospital was prepared to receive its inmates towards the beginning of spring, and Madeleine now thought it time to remove to it.

Her family then consisted of eight persons, besides herself, Lise, and Marie Michon; the hospital could contain about sixty individuals, but there were only beds for twenty at the present time. Notwithstanding the prudent remonstrances which assailed her from every quarter, Madeleine selected ten persons from amongst the most destitute and infirm in the village, and invited them to take up their abode in the village hospital as soon as it should be opened.

The important day which had been fixed by Madeleine for the removal of her family to their new abode, at length arrived. At an early hour in the morning, M. Dubois, with his tri-colour scarf, the emblem of his dignity, tied around his portly person, and followed by Jean Renaud, whom he treated with mortifying haughtiness, made his appearance at Madeleine's house, and with the most bustling and im-

portant look inquired if everything were ready. M. Bignon almost immediately followed him, and looked extremely agitated and nervous. Considering that a removal was going on, they found the house tolerably quiet. Marie seemed rather flurried, and Lise, who ran from one room to another, felt evidently in a state of great excitement; but Madeleine, who was at breakfast, wore her usual look of composure. When the meal was over—the last she was to take in that house—she rose, and, with Marie's assistance, had soon caused the remaining furniture—for as much as could be spared had been conveyed to the hospital on the preceding day—to be placed in a cart, which was waiting at the door. When this had been effected, nothing remained to do but to depart. M. Dubois, who was present in his official capacity, in order to do Madeleine more honour, now felt extremely anxious to know what was to be the order of the procession.

"For you see, Madeleine," he observed, "every eye will be upon us to-day; I verily believe that all the inhabitants of Mont-Saint-Jean will be present; and as I entered here I saw some fellows from Puy-saye, who had come to see the sight, I suppose. We must show them what we can do, Madeleine."

"Nay, sir, what can be done, and what will they see?" replied Madeleine, with a smile; "a cart of furniture, and a few old people, removing from one house to another."

"Ay, to be sure," said Jean Renaud, who had lately shown signs of insubordination, "what will they see?"

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Adjoint," wrathfully observed M. Dubois, who felt rather offended that Madeleine should not have considered him likely to excite attention and interest. "Madeleine," he continued, in a lofty tone, "I must beg to differ from you on this point; however unimportant the procession may be in itself, yet, when it is invested with an official character, it becomes the object of serious

consideration, especially when the whole world is as it were looking on. I believe M. Bignon is of my opinion," he added, with a ceremonious bow in the direction of the *curé*, who, thus roused from a deep reverie, into which the recollection of his departed friend had thrown him, replied, with a startled look,—

"O, yes! of course."

Madeleine, in the meanwhile, was arranging the order of the procession according to her own fashion: to M. Dubois's indignant astonishment the cart went first, then came the little body of the future inmates of the hospital; those who were too sick or infirm to walk being carried on rude litters; Madeleine walked at their head, with M. Bignon on her right hand, and the mayor and his adjoint on her left. Marie Michon and Lise brought up the rear. As soon as they left the house and appeared in the street, a low murmur ran through the crowd, which had gathered around the house, though not so near as to impede the progress of the little caravan.

"Ay, there she goes! that is Madeleine, with the gray cloak!" was the exclamation to which several persons gave utterance, for, as M. Dubois had truly observed, there were many individuals of the neighbouring villages present. Madeleine was at first startled by the appearance of so large a crowd, but the looks of affection and heartfelt respect which she met on every side, soon made her resume her usual serenity. On a sign from her, the man who was to lead the cart urged his horse forward, and the whole procession, as M. Dubois styled it, began to move, followed by the crowd. The mayor, who, whether by accident or design, always preceded his companions, naturally considered his majestic person and tri-colour scarf as the chief points of attraction; was he not, indeed, the representative of government on this solemn occasion? He would have been somewhat mortified had he known that Madeleine was the only individual who excited real interest.

Though this was a solemn day in her life, she bore it, as she did everything, whether of weal or woe, with calmness. She was grave and thoughtful, however, for memory carried her back to all that had occurred during the four years which had elapsed since she had first conceived her bold project. Seeing her abstracted and silent, M. Bignon did not speak; M. Dubois was too much wrapped up in the consideration of his own importance to do anything, save when he occasionally thought fit to administer a sharp reproof to his adjoint. The behaviour of the crowd seemed modelled on that of Madeleine: every one looked grave and composed, and walked quietly along. In about a quarter of an hour they reached the foot of the hill, on which now arose that hospital which had so long been treated as the dream of an enthusiastic girl. The morning was lovely, and the brilliant sunshine and cloudless azure sky enhanced the romantic beauty of the surrounding scenery; but no one thought of admiring anything save the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean, with its white walls, green shutters, and slate-covered roof. It was, however, a low, unpretending, and unpicturesque-looking building; standing in the middle of a large tract of ground, laid out in a manner which showed that advantage had been more consulted than taste or beauty. Still, there was an air of comfort about the whole place that made it look like the abode of some wealthy farmer; but, though it was by no means calculated to give the idea of an hospital, every one pronounced it perfect in its way, and declared that it was vastly superior to the building which adorned the *chef-lieu* of the department. The only token of a public character which the edifice displayed, was the tri-colour flag, which had been hoisted by M. Dubois's directions, and now waved proudly from the summit of the highest chimney.

When they were within about twenty yards of the house, Madeleine stepped forward, and taking the lead, advanced to open the door, for she had so arranged matters, that all the members of her family

might find accommodation, for the present, without being disturbed by the removal of the furniture. When she stood on the threshold of her new abode, Madeleine paused, with deep emotion, and, as she raised her glance to Heaven, and clasped her hands fervently, she repeated, in a low tone, the words of Simeon :

“ Now mayst thou dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace ; because mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.”

Marie, who stood near Madeleine, alone heard these words, and marked the look and smile of rapturous joy which dwelt on the features of the speaker, investing them for a while with almost unearthly beauty. But, while she was still wondering, uneasily, what Madeleine's exclamation could signify, her friend turned round, and addressing her family, which now crowded around her, gently said,

“ Children, this is your home.”

The words could not have been more simple, yet many wept on hearing them, for, as they gazed on Madeleine's fragile form and pale features, all remembered the toil and anxiety which it had cost her to win that home for the poor.

The door now being thrown open, every one wanted to obtain a sight of the interior of the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean. M. Dubois, however, interfered, and made a long speech on the necessity of preserving order, and on the fines he would inflict on any disturbers of the public peace. He did not appear to produce much effect until Madeleine requested, in a few words, that no interruption might be given to the removal of the furniture, after which, she promised that every one should see the hospital. In a very short space of time, the different articles with which the cart was loaded had been put in their proper places, and about a dozen individuals were admitted to look over the establishment. They left the place by a back door, and were succeeded by others ; thus,

owing to Madeleine's excellent management, even the appearance of confusion was avoided, whilst every one's curiosity was satisfied.

There was, however, little to see in the whole place; a large room, commanding a pleasant view of the surrounding hills, and which was to have been the salon of the visitors to the mineral spring, was now converted into the infirmary, and contained twelve beds, though it could hold as many as forty; a collection of medicines, which had been presented to the hospital by Dr. Détrimont, was placed in an adjoining apartment, with all the linen of the family. One wing of the building remained unoccupied for the present, and Madeleine made a kind of storehouse for her provisions of the other. The outhouses, cow-house, &c., were such as might belong to a small farm, for, though Madeleine now possessed a large tract of land, she was still deficient in much that constitutes a farmer's wealth.

Several hours elapsed before every one had seen the hospital; and not until this had been accomplished, and she had heard blessings repeatedly called down upon her name, was Madeleine allowed to remain in quietness. Neither M. Dubois nor M. Bignon left her, however, but they both remained to talk to her, as well as M. Détrimont, who had called in, in the course of the morning.

"Well, Madeleine," observed the mayor, sitting down, as though completely exhausted by the exertions of the morning, "we have got over it at length, and so you have your hospital. But mind, Madeleine, you must not fill it too fast, for I need not tell you that the burden of supporting its tenants will rest solely upon you; so mind, I say, and do not fill it too fast."

"Yes, Madeleine," said M. Détrimont, "you must, indeed, be careful; you have had toil and anxiety enough already; be cautious, therefore."

M. Bignon enforced this prudent counsel by various arguments. Madeleine listened to her advisers

with due deference, but when they had ceased speaking, she fixed her earnest gaze upon them, and gravely observed :

“ If God fills this house, do you think he will not, or cannot, also provide for it ? ”

They looked at one another, but made no reply.

Although her simple argument had silenced them, Madeleine, as if compassionating their want of faith explained to them her plans for the future.

“ The hospital,” she said, “ already possessed a large tract of ground in a productive state ; she had sold, a few months before, the land belonging to her, and, with the money she had received for it, had purchased a few fields adjoining her present abode. The produce of this land in corn and vegetables sufficed to maintain the establishment. Then all we require for the present,” she added, “ is a little money to buy meat occasionally, and provide us with clothing ; but neither Marie nor myself mean to remain idle ; then, surely, it is not presumptuous to hope that our earnings will supply whatever deficiencies may occur.”

“ Well, I will grant this,” answered the mayor, “ but you have only twenty patients now ; how will you manage when, according to your intention, you will have sixty ? ”

“ Providence will see to that,” answered Madeleine, with a smile. And M. Dubois, being hopeless of bringing her round to his way of thinking, rose and departed, but not without once more congratulating Madeleine on her success, and hinting at the share he had in it. M. Détrumont took his leave soon afterwards, for he had only called on his way to another village ; his last words to Madeleine contained a recommendation about not over-exerting herself, and taking care of her health. When they were both gone, M. Bignon also rose to depart. He had spoken little the whole morning, but as he now addressed Madeleine, his voice was deeply moved.

“ Madeleine,” said he, as he stood on the threshold

of her new home, "I will not call down the blessing of Heaven either on you or on this place before I go, for I know that it is with both already. I remember that on a morning like this, four years ago, you called upon me to tell me that an hospital should one day rise on this very spot, yet I did not believe you; it stands before me now to reprove my want of faith. But there was one who always believed in you, Madeleine; he loved you, and understood you well, for he had a soul to conceive all that was good and great; but I did not mean to speak of him," added the worthy priest, checking himself, with a sigh; what I wanted to say, Madeleine, was, that though in spiritual matters it were fitter for me to crave your assistance than for you to seek mine, yet there may be earthly concerns in which I can help you: if so, speak, for I know you have much to do and settle."

"I thank you, sir," replied Madeleine; "and since such is the case, I will make one request."

"What is it, Madeleine?" asked M. Bignon, with much alacrity.

"Merely, sir, that you will be so kind as to write to Madame de Boissy, the lady whom I met in the wood last year, and who collected the money for me, to tell her that the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean is now opened. I promised to let her know when this should happen, and you will tell her all much better than I could."

"Nay, Madeleine, I do not grant this; but I know you are very busy now, and so I will write the letter. Do you wish for nothing else?"

"For nothing, sir, thank you."

"Then farewell, Madeleine; God bless you!"

Madeleine returned his farewell, and the priest departed. The remainder of the day produced no remarkable event, and was merely spent in all the bustle usually attending a removal.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTER the lapse of a few days Madeleine and her family were comfortably settled in their new abode, or, as it was now generally called, the Hospital. M. Dubois, who felt, as he said, that he had acted an important part in the whole affair, was extremely anxious that the edifice—so he termed it—should either possess a more dignified appellation, or be at least adorned with an inscription. Though Madeleine thought that “The Hospital” was as good a name as any, she was prevailed upon to have her house christened anew, and a consultation at which she assisted was accordingly held on this important subject in the mairie. M. Dubois opened the proceedings, by proposing to call the hospital “The Asylum of the Unhappy.”

“Nay,” said Madeleine, “that would not be correct; for I assure you, M. Dubois, that we are all very happy at home.”

Several other suggestions were made, all equally inappropriate; M. Bignon at length proposed “The House of the Poor.”

But to this Madeleine also objected.

“If we call it ‘The House of the Poor,’” she remarked, “no one will like to go into it; let us rather give it a name which will make it no shame to dwell in it, and call it ‘The House of God.’”

M. Bignon greatly approved of this idea, though he informed Madeleine that it was not an original one, as *Maison-Dieu* and *Hotel-Dieu* were common names for such charitable establishments during the middle ages. But M. Dubois, who felt secretly piqued at the indifference with which his sentimental name of “Asylum for the Unhappy” had been

treated, declared that, unless it were couched in Latin or some other learned language, Madeleine's suggestion was of too common-place a character to be adopted. As M. Bignon seconded this remark, *Domus Domini* was agreed upon as the name under which the hospital should be known in future.

"Let it be as you like," quietly remarked Madeleine, "but what is the use of a name which no one save M. Bignon can understand?"

"Aye," echoed Jean Renaud, "what is the use of it?"

"Hold your tongue, sir," sternly said the mayor; "you do not understand Latin, I believe."

"No more does Madeleine," replied the adjoint, who, if he had dared, would have added that M. Dubois was equally ignorant of the learned language.

The mayor was determined, however, that a Latin inscription should adorn the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean, and, as Madeleine felt rather indifferent on this important subject, he easily carried his point. In less than a week a blue tablet with golden letters was fixed over the unpretending door of the establishment, setting forth that it had been built and opened whilst Jacques Dubois was mayor of Mont-Saint-Jean; but as this piece of information was, like the name of the hospital, couched in the Latin tongue, it was wholly lost on the many, which somewhat lessened the gratification of the mayor. The Latin name proved, moreover, quite a failure; every one persisted in calling Madeleine's house the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean; and as the blue tablet, with the inscription in gold letters, fell to pieces before it had been up six months, M. Dubois, at whose expense it had been put in its place, saw all his hopes of future glory vanish with it, but had sufficient wisdom not to have it replaced by another.

The summer passed away without producing any remarkable event. The fame of the hospital spread, however, over the country, and it was now considered one of the curiosities of Auvergne. Numerous visi-

tors came to visit the establishment, and, though they found much to criticise, telling Madeleine that her hospital ought to have been built on a very different plan, and provided with many conveniences in which it was deficient, they generally ended by complimenting her on the order she had established, and left some substantial tokens of their approbation. The donations which she thus received soon enabled Madeleine to repay the thousand francs which she owed M. Dubois and the other individuals who had lent her that sum. It was not until this debt had been paid that she thought herself at liberty to admit into the hospital as many individuals as it could contain; she did not effect this abruptly, but the house seemed to fill imperceptibly. Now it was an old woman who begged to be received, pleading her poverty and great age, and how could Madeleine refuse to admit her? then some poor crippled child, a burden or an object of dislike to its parents, was taken in. The claim of the sick was of course never disregarded; and, as there were neither guardians nor overseers to impose a check on the applicants, who were always heard by Madeleine herself, it so happened that a year after it had been opened the hospital contained no less than fifty persons. How Madeleine provided for them all was the never-ceasing wonder of the whole village.

But Madeleine seemed able to explain anything. In the first place, the hospital was, as she asserted, partly self-supporting. The donations which she had received since repaying the thousand francs had been judiciously applied by her to the purchase of land; so that in what seemed, and in what really was, a very short space of time, the hospital stood in the centre of its own grounds, which soon became noted for their fertility and extent. As Madeleine was obliged to hire labourers to cultivate her land, the income she derived from it was much less than it might have been otherwise; but she contrived to make up for this deficiency by rendering every able

member of her family useful in one way or another. Some of the old men attended to the vegetable garden, and kept it in proper order; the old dames who had become Madeleine's guests cleaned the rooms or mended the linen of the family; the children performed the errands; but the task of attending on the sick was chiefly allotted to Madeleine and Marie Michon. Notwithstanding her economy and excellent management, Madeleine occasionally found herself in difficulties, for which even she could suggest no relief save in the help of the charitable. Whenever this was the case, she had recourse to a simple plan, which generally proved successful. This was to go about the village carrying a large basket destined to contain the voluntary contributions of the villagers, who never waited to be asked in order to place in it whatever they felt willing to give. The most wealthy contributed a loaf of bread, or perhaps even a piece of meat; the poor gave whatever they could spare, though it might be only a handful of chestnuts—they knew that Madeleine despised not the least offering. But, though her appeal in favour of the hospital had never yet been made in vain, it was very seldom that Madeleine resorted to this method of lightening the burden which rested upon her.

When the hospital had been opened about six months, M. Détrimont, who always called in whenever he had occasion to pass through Mont-Saint-Jean, declared that the fatigue Madeleine experienced was too great for her in her delicate state of health, and that Marie Michon's assistance was not sufficient. As soon as this was known in the village, three women offered her their services. They were all equally fitted for the task, and, when she was called upon to choose one of them, Madeleine said so, observing at the same time that she only needed one assistant. After a little hesitation she selected a middle-aged and childless widow, "and who was therefore best suited," said Madeleine, "to become the mother of the poor."

As Widow Marguerite was much esteemed in Mont-Saint-Jean, this decision gave universal satisfaction, and her aid certainly proved very valuable to Madeleine.

But, though matters seemed once more to go on smoothly, Marie Michon did not feel satisfied, for it seemed to her that, instead of improving, Madeleine's health was perceptibly declining. She only complained occasionally of a sharp pain in the region of the heart, but the hectic flushes which frequently overspread her features, and the languor of her general appearance, gave her friend serious uneasiness. Though M. Détrimont watched over her with the greatest care, and though Madeleine followed his advice with implicit docility, no change for the better seemed to take place in her health.

Marie's uneasiness was greatly increased by the peculiar state of her friend's mind. She was as gentle, and spoke as kindly, as ever; but, though far from relaxing in the zealous discharge of her duties, she seemed on the contrary insensible to fatigue whenever they were concerned. Marie watched with anxiety and surprise the mental excitement which now seemed to accompany every effort.

"Why, Madeleine," said she to her one day, when, in spite of her evident exhaustion, Madeleine seemed bent on finishing some piece of needlework on which she was engaged, "what ails you? One might think, to see you toiling so, that you were some poor working girl, anxious to get rid of her task, and have her day's labour over."

Madeleine looked up, and gravely replied, "You speak more truly than you think, Marie."

"How so?" falteringly asked her friend.

"Yes," continued Madeleine, passing her hand across her feverish brow, "I do feel sometimes like those who have toiled through the heat of the day, and who, when evening comes on, long for repose. And, is it not strange, Marie? it is since my task is

almost over, since we came here, that my strength seems to leave me, slowly though surely, every day. Think of how much there is yet to do here, and wonder not, therefore, if I seem to hurry now, though the end of all my toil is near.

"Oh, Madeleine!" earnestly exclaimed Marie, "take some rest, for the love of heaven! Is there not time enough for what remains to be done?"

But Madeleine shook her head, and gently said, "Thou dost not understand me, child: that is not the repose I speak of, and for which I long."

"Of what rest do you then speak?" asked Marie, with evident astonishment.

"I cannot explain it well, though I feel it deeply," thoughtfully answered Madeleine; "but it is indeed a rest beyond all troubling—something like what we feel when, after a day's weary toil, we lay down to sleep with our hearts still full of prayer."

Marie turned her head away to hide her tears; but after a while she threw her arms around the neck of Madeleine, and in a broken tone exclaimed,

"Oh, Madeleine! dear Madeleine! do not leave me yet—do not! and, for the love you bear me, speak no more of that strange rest."

"Nay," said Madeleine, with a smile, "think lightly of it; what was it but a wayward fancy? Since it troubles thee so much, I shall mention it no more."

Marie dried her tears, and strove to look cheerful; but it saddened her to feel that, though Madeleine might not mention it again, the thought of that strange, untroubled repose would still dwell in her mind.

Marie had feared the effects of the winter for her friend, but to her great joy Madeleine did not seem to suffer from the cold, and, on the contrary, appeared rather better by the return of spring. Her labour was not lessened, however, for during the severe winter months many new inmates had been admitted into the hospital; but Providence seemed indeed to

watch over Madeleine, and, though her large family still went on increasing, none of its members ever wanted their daily bread.

"So you see, sir," she could not help observing with a smile to M. Dubois, "that when God fills a house he also provides for it."

"Yes, Madeleine," replied the mayor, "but you have made heavy sacrifices: you have sold the little land you possessed, without speaking of your house. By-the-by, do you know that it has proved a sad bargain for me; no tenants will remain in it, it is so lonely. I wish you would take it back again."

"No, I cannot do that," replied Madeleine, "but I can rent it from you for a year or two."

"You! rent it!" exclaimed M. Dubois, much surprised.

"Yes," quietly answered Madeleine, "though others may find it lonely, it is there I should like to live."

"Then you intend leaving the hospital?"

"Nay, not entirely; but my health is not good, and I often long for repose and solitude."

"And so you want to go back there? Well, Madeleine, as you like; but it is a strange fancy."

"I know what you think, M. Dubois, that it is extravagant in me to pay house-rent when I can be lodged here for nothing. But it is not high, and the produce of the garden, with what I can earn by spinning, will cover it; besides, I shall only take it at midsummer, and I feel that I shall not take it long."

"Nay, Madeleine, I was not thinking of that, for surely if it is your fancy you have a right to indulge yourself in it. But indeed it is a strange wish."

"We all love some spot more than any other," replied Madeleine, "and my heart clings to this. There was a time when I should have wished it to be mine own, but now I am satisfied to live in it, even though it is another's property; for would it not become such in a few years, perhaps even less, though it were mine now!" she added, with a mournful smile, which M. Dubois vainly strove to understand.

When a few days afterwards he repeated the substance of this conversation to Marie Michon, with the agreement by which it had been followed, the poor girl wept bitterly; but when he pressed her to explain the meaning of her tears, and of Madeleine's discourse, she only shook her head with deep melancholy.

"How very strange!" thought M. Dubois; "can anything be the matter with Madeleine? She looks rather paler than formerly; but surely if she were really unwell she would not go to live in that lonely place. I suppose Marie is only grieved at the thought of losing her."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean was now in a thriving condition; "My task is done," often said Madeleine to Marie, who never heard her say so without heaving a sigh, for it seemed as if the consciousness that her services were no longer needed—that she had fulfilled her appointed duty to the end—lessened Madeleine's remaining strength, and rendered her weaker every day. It was indeed impossible to behold her now without feeling how much she was altered; her features were still mild and serene, but their hue had become pale and sickly; her step had lost its former elasticity, and the general languor and debility of her appearance told of the disease which was preying within.

Though Madeleine did not complain, it was evident to all that her health was very much impaired. The general impression was that she had injured herself by over-exertions in the cause of the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean; indeed Doctor Détrimont said so, and the evident anxiety with which he watched over her in her declining state caused many to fear for her life. These apprehensions created deep sorrow, for Madeleine was universally beloved; but of this, as well as of her precarious condition, she seemed unconscious. Though her increasing weakness produced in her a natural distaste for the active life she had led hitherto, and made her seek quietness and repose, her cheerfulness was greater than it had ever been. When she was asked the cause of this, she answered, with a smile, that, the hospital being now established, and in a prosperous state, she could banish care from her mind: "So you see," she would add, "that I have now nothing to do save to be happy and quiet for the rest of my life."

But, when she spoke thus, people became sad, and, exchanging significant looks, shook their heads, as

much as to imply that Madeleine had not, perhaps, so long to live as she might think.

One morning, towards the end of spring, when M. Détrumont called upon Madeleine, in passing through the village, he was somewhat surprised to hear her asking him, with unusual gravity, to grant her a private interview; he assented, and she led the way to a little back room overlooking the garden, where they were in no fear of being disturbed. When they were seated, Madeleine turned towards M. Détrumont, and calmly said,—

“I want to ask you one question, sir; how long do you think I have still to live?”

“Madeleine!” exclaimed the doctor.

She read his meaning in his look, but sadly shook her head.

“Tell me not,” she said, “that I have still many years to live; I feel that my days are numbered; all I want to know is, the time I have yet to spend upon earth.”

M. Détrumont looked at Madeleine long and fixedly; she was as calm and serene as though her own fate were not the object of her questioning.

“Madeleine,” said he at length, “why do you ask me this?”

“Because I wish to be prepared for death when it does come,” she gravely replied. “Do not deceive me, for I know you cannot tell me my illness is not fatal. I have felt it here too long,” and she laid her hand upon her heart, “not to be aware that there is no cure.”

M. Détrumont could not indeed contradict this, he therefore remained silent; she repeated her question.

“Madeleine,” said the doctor, after another long pause, “I know that I am not speaking to an ordinary woman, and that you will neither faint nor go into fits if I tell you the truth; I will therefore acknowledge that your disease is one of the heart in its last stage; I have long watched over you, but there is no cure.”

Madeleine was not above humanity, and as she heard the doctor's sentence, her cheek grew pale and her lips quivered slightly, but these signs of emotion soon passed away from her features, and left them as calm as before. M. Détrimont, who watched her narrowly, read every one of her feelings on her ingenuous countenance: he saw that the natural dread of death, implanted in every human being, had first prevailed, but had soon been conquered by that pure and holy faith which characterised her; and he secretly admired her more for this transient weakness, and the subsequent victory, than he could have done for the most stoical fortitude.

"But how long do you think I may live?" again asked Madeleine, after remaining silent for a few minutes.

"I think that with care your life might be prolonged for more than a year."

"What! so long as that?" said Madeleine, with a melancholy smile.

"Yes, Madeleine, but mind that I said—with care," urged the doctor, desirous of impressing this condition on her mind.

"Yes, sir, I understand," replied Madeleine, "I shall take every necessary precaution; for, God forbid that the sin of my own death should rest on my soul! but may not an accident occur by which I may be deprived of life before that time?"

"Assuredly," said the doctor, "it is possible, but I cannot foretell this."

"Sir," resumed Madeleine, "I should like, with God's will, to know the hour of my own death, for, though I have no grievous sin on my soul, still I think it is well to be prepared for such an awful change. Though you cannot foretell when it will occur, you can perhaps describe to me the symptoms by which it will be preceded, and this I should wish you, if you have leisure, to do now."

This was certainly a strange request, yet Madeleine made it with perfect simplicity and truth. M.

Détrimont understood her character thoroughly ; he knew that she had never undertaken a task to which she was not equal, and that if she now asked him to speak to her openly on this subject it was because she could bear to hear the truth, however painful it might have proved to an ordinary mind. He therefore complied with her request, and proceeded to explain to her the nature of the disease with which she was afflicted, as well as the symptoms by which a crisis was likely to manifest itself. Though M. Détrumont loved Madeleine, he was a medical man, and rather apt to view his patients as objects of scientific demonstration ; on this occasion he soon forgot to whom he was speaking, and entered with anatomical precision into all the details concerning the functions of the heart, the manner in which ossification took place, the remedies which he had employed in her case, and their inefficacy. Madeleine listened to him with deep attention, occasionally asked him to explain some point which she could not understand, and dwelt especially on those signs which, according to his explanation, announced the approach of death, though he warned her at the same time that she should not trust too much to them, as they were apt to be exceedingly uncertain.

"Ah! Madeleine!" said he, when he had concluded, and his mind once more reverted to her, "How often did I tell you that you were killing yourself! you see it now."

Madeleine seemed so much distressed, on hearing this, that the kind-hearted doctor immediately repented having uttered the words.

"Sir," said she, "what you tell me gives me much pain, for I think it a great sin to shorten our own life. But, what could I do? You know how much Mont-Saint-Jean wanted an hospital, and how many poor creatures died every year because there was not one. I did all that I could not to over-exert myself, but, when you remonstrated with me on the subject, I asked myself whether it was not better

that one life should be risked for the good of all, than that I should spare my health, and thus delay the erection of the hospital for many years. But are you sure, sir, that even were it not for this I should have lived long?"

"I believe, Madeleine, that the seeds of this disease have been in you for several years, but I know that your life could have been prolonged for a great space of time in comparison with that allotted to it now. This is all I can say for your comfort."

Madeleine sighed, and seemed disturbed. "The will of God be done!" she at length observed; "what is passed cannot be recalled. I acted for the best, for indeed I did not wish to die, and, if it were the will of Heaven, I would willingly live. But it would be both useless and sinful to repine now. And why should I repine? how often have I asked of Heaven to live only to see the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean, and then die in peace! My prayer has been granted, and I am indeed happy!"

There was so much truthful fervour in her tone as she spoke thus, that the doctor felt the words had been uttered from her heart. He gazed upon her, with a look in which sorrow and admiration were equally blended, and sighed, as he observed,--

"You are a noble being, Madeleine; it is a pity such should die."

A flush came over Madeleine's pale features, and she smiled for a moment, but, without making any reply to M. Détrimont's remark, she calmly said, "I have yet another request to make; it is, that you will not repeat to any one the subject of our present discourse, nor even reveal how soon my end may be. You know, sir," she continued, with a melancholy smile, "that there are many people who love me in Mont-Saint-Jean; if they thought I had only a short time to live, they would take such care of me that my life would certainly be shortened. I wish to die my own way. Mine has been a troubled life for the last few years; whilst I had my end in view I did not

mind this, but now that my task is done, my heart yearns for rest and solitude. I am, besides, growing weaker every day, and, therefore, less fitted for my duties here; I feel that I must return to my old home by the churchyard."

"Madeleine!" exclaimed the doctor, in a tone of disapprobation. But though Madeleine understood his meaning, she shook her head.

"Nay, sir, I must do as I have said, for my heart is bent upon this plan. I am aware, however, that I shall meet with opposition, and, if it is known how ill I am, it will be still worse; this is why I want you not to say to others what you have said to me to-day; that, since nothing can restore me to life, I may at least be allowed to die in peace: so pray promise me this."

For a long time M. Détrimont refused, but Madeleine was earnest in her entreaties; she told him that she could take better care of herself than even her best friends, now that she understood her own illness; that she did not mean to be constantly alone, but to have Lise with her occasionally, and to pay frequent visits to the hospital. The doctor saw that, as she had said, her mind was indeed bent upon this plan; and reflecting that to thwart her could only give her pain, without inducing her to change her resolve, he at last gave the required promise, reserving to himself the right of infringing it whenever he should think fit.

When Madeleine had succeeded in obtaining this from him, they parted, for she feared that too long a conference might excite the suspicions of Marie. She looked as composed as usual in bidding the doctor farewell, but as he left her there was a shade of sadness on his brow.

When Madeleine was alone, she looked out thoughtfully from the open window near which she happened to be standing. It was a lovely summer morning; deep, cool-looking shadows still lingered in the distant valleys, whilst the hills lay bathed in a flood of glo-

rious sunshine; the sky had that deep azure blue which belongs to the summer alone; the earth looked green and lovely; the atmosphere was so clear and still, that the faintest of those low sounds, which may be called the voice of nature, rose distinctly on the ear of Madeleine; she looked again; her eyes grew dim with tears, and her heart was full of sadness. How long had she still to live? the doctor had said a year: then she began to count how many days she had to dwell upon earth, how often yet she might gaze on the fair scenes before her! Summer would come round again, she knew; but when it came, where should she be? Faith answered, at peace and in happiness; but the flesh said that earth was beautiful, and that she was young, very young to die. Why was her life to be so brief? those hills, those trees, and streams would still endure for many years after she was gone; they lived—but she, the nobler being, must die. And, again, she inwardly exclaimed, “Why must my days be so few?” She bowed her head, and clasped her hands; there was a deep conflict at her heart; could she have hoped, she would have said, “Oh! Father, take this cup from me!” but her fate was fixed, and she knew it. She looked once more; how her heart clung to everything that was beautiful in nature, and how fondly her glance lingered over the loveliness to which she inwardly bade farewell. But this struggle could not last. Notwithstanding her passing regret of life, Madeleine had long been resigned to her approaching end; her sorrow gradually grew less; she remembered that earth, though lovely, was, like herself, perishable; and then she thought of the brevity of every human life. Since the end of all was death, what mattered it whether she lived a few years more or less; and, in her altered mood, Madeleine now almost smiled at the vanity of her unavailing regrets.

During the whole of the week that followed her interview with the doctor, Madeleine’s behaviour underwent no perceptible change; still a vague sense

of uneasiness was on Marie Michon's mind; she noticed that her friend was more than usually scrupulous in superintending the arrangements of the household, that she looked over all the linen, and took an inventory of it; the different medicines were likewise arranged by her in the medicine-chest, and she saw that the infirmary was supplied with whatever it wanted; in short, she seemed so anxious for everything to be in its proper state, that Marie, after uneasily watching her proceedings for several days, could not at length help observing,—

“Why, Madeleine, what is the matter with you? One might think that you were going to take some long and weary journey.”

The smile which crossed Madeleine's features on hearing this was so sad, and yet so sweet, that Marie did not dare to ask her for any explanation, but fell into a deep fit of musing.

The next morning, which happened to be a Sunday, Madeleine, after breakfasting as usual with those members of her family who were either convalescent or in their usual state of health, addressed them thus:—

“Children; we have now been together for several years. Since the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean has been in existence, I have, according to your wish, administered it; I hope, and I believe, that I have done my duty. If it were God's will I would gladly remain with you, but my health is, as you know, very much impaired; and, though I have long delayed this moment, I feel that the time is now come when we must part.”

A general exclamation of sorrow and remonstrance followed these words. But Madeleine gently said, “Believe me, I have not done this without thinking maturely on the subject. You may give me pain by pressing me to remain with you, but it is impossible; I must go.”

“But why must you go?” urged Marie, who was weeping bitterly.

"I am not going yet," said Madeleine, without giving her a direct answer; "but listen to me, for I have more to say. As I am no longer able to act for you as I have done hitherto, some other person must take my place. I do not think any one so well fitted for the task as Marie Michon, who knows you all, and has long been accustomed with me to see to your wants. If you think so too, say so, and the matter can be settled now."

But, contrary to Madeleine's expectation, no one replied.

"Do you then object to Marie?" she asked, with evident surprise.

"No, Madeleine, we do not," answered one of the old women present, "but we want you to stay with us."

"Alas," sadly said Madeleine, "why do you ask this of me? You only grieve me; but indeed it cannot be."

"Nay," said Marie, earnestly, "do not refuse us, Madeleine; if you are weak and ill we will take care of you; you need only tell me what I must do, and it shall be done without any trouble to you."

"I cannot and will not consent to this," firmly said Madeleine; "urge me no more, Marie."

She resisted with equal firmness all the entreaties of those present, though they were renewed with importunate earnestness for nearly a quarter of an hour. Marie, who saw that, though she was resolved not to yield, the scene was becoming painful to Madeleine's feelings, now interfered, by observing, in a tone of reproach,—

"Nay, teaze her no more, she is bent on making us miserable, and any one knows that what Madeleine Guérin has determined to do must be done."

Without taking any heed of the apparent unkindness contained in this remark, Madeleine calmly said, "Since this point is settled, I ask you once

more whether you think Marie Michon is the person best suited to supply my place?"

This time Madeleine's question was answered by a general assent, for, next to her, Marie was greatly beloved.

"Then," said she, looking kindly on her friend, "let it be so; we will consult M. Dubois and M. Bignon to-morrow, and determine on the matter. And now," she continued, after a brief pause, "since I am going to resign the care I had of you into other hands, I think it right to bid you all farewell: do not misunderstand me," she quickly added, "I am not leaving Mont-Saint-Jean, and I trust that we shall often meet again, yet, as we are going to part, I feel the want of asking you to forgive me whatever I may have unwittingly done to hurt or injure you. Tell me not I have done nothing; perhaps it was not much—some hasty word or look which you soon forgot—but during several years there must have been something for you to forgive."

It was in vain for those present to remonstrate. Madeleine insisted, and as usual won her point; even Marie was forced to forgive her like the rest. When they had all complied, Madeleine looked kindly on her children, and in a low and gentle tone observed, "As you have forgiven me, so do I forgive you whatever you may have done to grieve me, though I now remember nothing; I shall, moreover, pray for you as long as I live, and, whenever it pleases God to remove me from this world, remember how I loved you all, and pray for the peace and repose of my soul. Farewell!"

Madeleine's last words were rendered almost inaudible by the tears and lamentations of those present, for, as she spoke of death, and asked them to pray for her, her voice had unconsciously taken a solemn tone, as though her end were at hand.

"Why do you weep?" she asked, with a look of surprise; "though I spoke of death, I do not think I

am going to die very soon. But, if I were, is not death the fate of everything mortal? and surely you never thought I should be spared. Weep not, therefore, but rejoice, for, after what has passed, after feeling that I have done my duty to the end, and fulfilled my appointed task, I am happier than I have ever yet been, excepting, perhaps, on the day when we all entered the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean for the first time. Weep not, therefore, I say again, but, if you love me, rejoice; for indeed there is peace in my soul."

Many, however, still wept silently, for they saw by Madeleine's manner that she knew of her approaching end, and they began to fear it was nearer still than they had thought. In a calm and cheerful tone, Madeleine endeavoured to comfort them, and, reminding them that it was time to go to mass, was the first to give them the example of preparing. On returning to the room shortly afterwards, she was surprised to see Lise sitting in it alone and weeping.

"What ails thee, Lise?" she hastily asked, drawing near her.

"Oh! Madeleine," passionately exclaimed the child, sobbing bitterly, as she clasped her arms around her neck, "you are going away, and I shall never see you again."

Madeleine sat down near her, and embraced her tenderly, "Weep not child," she gently said, "thou shalt come with me wherever I go, if such is thy wish."

Lise dried her tears, and smiled, as she looked up into the face of her adopted mother. "Then you will never leave me or go away from me?" she asked, with a searching glance.

Madeleine was smoothing the child's dark hair, and looking on her with a fond smile, but when she heard her question, she turned her face away that Lise might not see the tears which rose to her eyes. If there was a being on earth whom she loved it was her; she loved Marie, too, but with a different affec-

tion; Lise, whom she had rescued from the grave, was as her own child, and her heart yearned towards her like that of a mother. How bitter now seemed the prospect of parting from her for ever! But Madeleine soon checked the repining thought, and, turning towards her, calmly said, "I will not leave thee, child, as long as I live."

This promise was enough for Lise, who soon regained all her spirits.

Madeleine's behaviour during the remainder of the day was so cheerful and serene, that, if the inhabitants of the hospital could have forgotten her farewell in the morning, they might have fancied she had still many years to live. Never had the tones of her voice been more kind and gentle, and never had the calm, spiritual light in her eyes revealed so plainly the love and holy peace of the soul within.

CHAPTER XXV

AFTER a brief consultation with M. Bignon and the mayor on the following day, the choice which Madeleine had made of Marie to succeed her in the administration of the hospital was fully confirmed, and she immediately entered on the duties of her office. Nothing was changed in the establishment by this, for Marie scrupulously observed all the regulations instituted by her friend, whose prudence and wisdom were, in her opinion, unimpeachable. For a few days Madeleine did not speak of leaving, but at the end of a week she informed Marie that she was going to return to the house by the churchyard, where she accordingly caused a few articles of furniture to be transferred.

Marie wept on hearing this, and remonstrated; but Madeleine persisted in her purpose. She agreed, however, to return occasionally to the hospital, and consented that her room in it should be kept for her.

"Why are you sad, Marie?" she said to her friend; "you know that I can be happy though alone, and that I love the old place; let me, therefore, go in peace; the repose and solitude will do my heart good."

"Since you have so resolved, Madeleine, let it be," sadly replied Marie.

As Madeleine did not wish to give any particular solemnity to her departure, she went away quietly the same day with Lise, and without bidding any one farewell. When it was known in the hospital that she was actually gone, sorrow and consternation filled every mind; all felt, they said, as though she were lost to them for ever; and this melancholy impression seemed shared by the inhabitants of Mont-Saint-Jean. In a few days, however, Madeleine returned, looking as calm and cheerful as though no

separation had taken place. Her frame of mind appeared to be communicative; the sense of grief which had followed her departure gradually became less; her children saw, that, though her home might be changed, Madeleine's heart was still with them. After spending a week in the hospital, she went back to her house by the churchyard, and left Lise behind her; for, fearing that the solitude of her new abode might be prejudicial to the child's health, she induced her to stay in the village for a while. On the following Sunday Madeleine assisted at mass and vespers; and as she then seemed in her usual state of health, the apprehensions which had been conceived at first were now partly allayed.

Madeleine's mode of life thus gradually became as quiet and retired, and in every respect almost the same, as when it was described in the opening of this work. Nothing was altered in the cottage and its environs; the garden, the quiet churchyard, the mountain stream, all looked as of yore; and, when Madeleine was once more seen sitting at her door and spinning in the sunshine, it seemed so natural for her to be there again, that every one soon grew accustomed to the sight, and many pronounced her little altered; but though her smile was as sweet, and her greeting as kindly as ever, her low song was no longer heard; and when she spoke, she seemed to experience a sense of fatigue, which, with the waxen and sickly hue of her features, told another tale. The mind soon resumes its old habits, and Madeleine fell so readily into the routine of her former existence, that it might have been thought it was only the other day, and not five years before, that she had left her cottage for the house of Farmer Nicolas. She spent her days almost constantly in the open air during the fine weather, but she did not labour quite so assiduously as formerly; and, whenever she felt weary of her work, she took up her prayer-book and read for a while. She also devoted more time to prayer; and many of those who now entered her cottage towards

evening, found her kneeling near the open window gazing on the starry sky, and so deeply absorbed in her devotions, that she neither seemed to notice their approach, nor to hear the tones of their voice. This want of consciousness of the external world proceeded partly from the debilitated state of her health, but those who witnessed its effects declared that Madeleine had celestial visions and ecstasies ; a report which was confirmed by the growing languor and abstractedness of her manner.

Summer and autumn thus passed away. During all this time Madeleine had not lived in complete solitude ; Lise was often with her, M. Détrimont and the *curé* called frequently, and whenever Marie could spare a moment she spent it with her friend, who likewise received occasional visits from gloomy Pierre, as he continued to be called, though much of his misanthropy had left him. But when winter came on, Marie insisted that Madeleine should remove to the hospital ; and, as the doctor also declared this was necessary, she complied with the request. It was then all could perceive the progress which disease had made in her frame. Though her countenance was little altered, she had grown so thin and emaciated, and seemed so weak, that many foretold she would not outlive the winter. Contrary, however, to all expectation, she rallied gradually, and, when spring returned, was so much improved that she once more went to reside in her cottage by the churchyard. She was here visited on a fine morning by the doctor, who inquired after the state of her health, observing, that she looked better. But Madeleine shook her head, and said, "It is now upwards of nine months since you told me that I had not more than a year to spend in this world. More than the one-half of that time is past ; but I know that I shall never see the other."

"How can you know that, Madeleine ? I do not feel so confident on this subject, and yet I am a medical man."

"I feel it here," replied Madeleine, laying her hand upon her heart; and the hectic flush which crossed her features as she spoke, made M. Détrumont fear that she had spoken too truly.

"Madeleine," he gravely observed, "beware of imagining that you can tell or foresee the hour of your own death, for the mere imagination might be enough to kill you."

"I do not seek to fix a day known only to God," calmly replied Madeleine; "but when I feel my strength failing me more every day, and my step getting more slow, and my hand less steady, I also feel that the time draws near."

"Then why stay here, Madeleine? why not return to the hospital, where every care would be taken of you?"

"Nay, sir, I am happier here," replied Madeleine, "and here I wish to remain as long as I can. When the time comes I shall leave."

Madeleine, indeed, clung to her old home with a strange and lingering affection, which only grew stronger as her life drew to its close. The recollections of love, faith, and happiness connected with this dwelling of her youth had made it very dear to her; but this was not her only reason for residing in it now. As long as it had been necessary, she had willingly sacrificed her love of a quiet life to the great thought of her soul; but, now that her task was done, she longed once more for the silence and repose she had relinquished for a time. Madeleine's disposition was not unsociable, but the secluded manner in which her youth had been spent, and the natural bent of her mind, prevented her from taking pleasure in the chit-chat gossip of which conversation chiefly consisted in Mont-Saint-Jean.

It is true that she loved those whom she had for several years called her children, and to whom she still gave that name, but she loved them as human beings, as creatures of God more than as individuals. Her affection for Marie Michon and Lise was more

deep, but it was because she felt it to be so that she wished to wean herself from it now, to turn her heart to heaven without one earthly alloy. It was owing to these reasons that Madeleine now chiefly sought the companionship of youth, and preferred it to the society of persons of maturer age. Even in the decline of her life she still felt the longing of usefulness which had drawn her forth from her solitude, and she was seldom seen in the village without having around her a group of children, to whom she taught some simple lesson, or whom she amused with a childish story or legend.

But even this indulgence, for it was one to her, had to be relinquished by Madeleine in consequence of her weakened state. Although she never complained, her slow decay daily became more apparent. She still sat in the sunshine on the step of her door, but her wheel was wholly neglected, and her prayer-book seemed her constant companion. Lise was now almost always with her, yet, whenever she left her in order to return to Mont-Saint-Jean, the child noticed that Madeleine's farewell blessing had something strange and solemn in it, which made her feel uneasy, she knew not why. Madeleine now also took a particular pleasure in wandering about the old churchyard near her dwelling; sometimes she prayed near her father's grave, and, when she felt tired, rested on the step of the stone cross which rose in the centre of the place. Marie Michon, calling upon her one morning, was surprised to find her sitting there and reading.

"Why do you come here to read, Madeleine?" she uneasily inquired.

"It is a pleasant spot," calmly said Madeleine, "more warm and sunny than the door step."

Still Marie felt troubled, and would have preferred to see her in any other place.

About this time there happened an event which it was feared would have a fatal effect on the health and spirits of Madeleine in her present weak condition;

this was the death of Maurice, whom she had never seen since their separation. She heard the tidings, however, with seeming calmness, and merely said, "The will of God be done!" A few days afterwards she inquired into the details of his death, and seemed deeply moved on hearing of Rosette's grief. She even expressed the wish of going to see her, but, as her enfeebled state prevented this, she relinquished the idea. Madeleine now became so weak, that Marie insisted that she should remove to the hospital, but it seemed as though the thought of being obliged to leave her home gave her new strength, for she suddenly grew better, and persisted in remaining, to which Marie reluctantly agreed.

Lise was now about eleven years of age, and an old relation of hers, who lived in one of the neighbouring villages, and had not seen her for a long time, requested that she might spend a few days with her. Madeleine immediately acceded to her request, but when the time came to part from her adopted daughter she vainly endeavoured to assume a cheerful bearing. The sadness and solemnity of her farewell, the numerous recommendations which she addressed to her on her future conduct, all contributed to make Lise believe that their separation was to be of a much longer duration than she had been told.

"Oh, Madeleine!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, "I see what it is; I am to stay at my aunt's, and to see you no more!"

"Nay, Heaven forbid!" earnestly ejaculated Madeleine. "That is to say," she added, correcting herself, "that if such were the will of God I should wish to see thee again; but, thou mayest believe me, thou art not to stay more than a week at thy aunt's."

"Then I shall see you again, dear Madeleine?" said the child.

"Why dost thou ask this?"

"Because a while ago you spoke as though we should never meet again; but we shall, shall we not?"

Madeleine made no reply, she hung down her head and clasped her hands, and merely said, "The will of God be done!"

"What, Madeleine! shall I see you no more?" uneasily asked Lise.

Still Madeleine answered not, but shook her head; the child earnestly repeated her question.

"I did not say that, child," at length said Madeleine, "but thou hast tarried too long—farewell!"

Madeleine stooped to embrace her, and Lise looked anxiously into her face, as though to read her meaning in her very soul; but Madeleine's countenance, though sad, was calm and serene, and, beyond her usual affection, she saw nothing there. Still Lise went hesitatingly away, and, as she followed the path which led to Mont-Saint-Jean, she often looked behind her. Madeleine was standing on the threshold, gazing after her with a sad and thoughtful glance, for she remembered how, on a day like this, and along the same path, Maurice had gone away for ever.

When Marie heard that Madeleine was alone, she wanted her to come to the hospital, but, not being able to induce her to do this, she declared that she would come to see her every day. As Madeleine knew that her presence was not then very much needed at the hospital, she raised no objection to this plan, and even promised Marie that she would soon live with her entirely.

"Then why not come at once?" asked her friend.

"The summer days are so pleasant here," replied Madeleine; "I will go when autumn comes on."

Marie sighed, but did not urge her further.

On the evening of the fifth day of Lise's absence, as Marie was on the point of returning to the village, Madeleine, who seemed much better, declared that she wanted to see M. Bignon, and would accompany her. Marie was astonished, and remonstrated on the fatigue she would thus undergo, but Madeleine asserted that she was equal to the task; and,

though the way was rather long and steep, she never once complained of weariness, and even said, when she reached the house of M. Bignon, that the walk had done her good.

Dame Ursula informed her that her master was with one of the villagers, then at the point of death. Madeleine declared her intention of waiting for him, and sat down in the honeysuckle arbour, near the porch. In about half an hour M. Bignon appeared; he looked pale and sad.

"Is Antoine dead?" asked Ursula.

The priest made an affirmative sign, and entered his study, where he sank down on a seat. Madeleine followed him, but remained silent until the house-keeper had given her master a drink and retired. She then said:

"Sir, I am come to you for confession."

Ursula could hear distinctly, from the next room, the exclamation of surprise which burst from M. Bignon's lips.

"You do not mean to-night, child, do you? It is too late."

"Yes," thoughtfully replied Madeleine, "it is late, yet it must be to-night. That is," she meekly added, "if you will, as I trust, hear my sins."

"Your sins!" echoed the priest, with a sigh; "ah! child, will nothing then cure you of speaking about them? What are they, I should like to know, when compared to those of certain sinners I wot of?"

Madeleine was accustomed to hear similar remarks from M. Bignon: she therefore made no direct reply, but merely said, "Can you hear me, sir? the way before me is long, and I must spend the night in vigil and prayer."

"Why, Madeleine!" impatiently exclaimed M. Bignon, "what grievous fault is it that weighs so heavily on your soul? I trust," he added, with assumed severity, "you are not in a state of mortal sin?"

"I trust not, sir."

"Then what do you want me to do for you?"

"To hear my confession," answered Madeleine's calm voice.

The priest groaned.

"Madeleine, my good girl!" said he, "take my advice, go to the hospital, and sleep instead of watching."

"I came from the valley for this, sir," observed Madeleine.

"Then you did a foolish thing," almost angrily remarked M. Bignon, "and it will be more foolish still to go back again to the valley to-night, weak as you are."

"Sir," solemnly said Madeleine, "it was no idle fancy that led me hither; in the name of Heaven, I conjure you to hear me!"

This appeal was not to be resisted; and Ursula, who had listened to this brief conversation in silent wonder, now heard her master rise and close the door, as though to comply with Madeleine's request. In about a quarter of an hour the door opened again, and M. Bignon and Madeleine came forth; neither of them appeared to notice Ursula, who was sitting in the recess of the window. The *curé* accompanied her as far as the garden-gate, and Ursula saw that she took the path leading to the valley. She could not help being struck with the slightness of her figure as it slowly vanished in the gathering gloom, and she watched it until it was concealed from her view by a sudden turning of the path. On looking up she perceived that M. Bignon, who was still standing near the gate, had been similarly engaged. After remaining a while in the same attitude, he slowly walked back towards the house.

"How like a spirit Madeleine looked to-night," observed the housekeeper to her master as he entered the room; "and yet she seemed better."

"She is a saint," gravely said the priest, "and I verily believe that her place is now ready in heaven."

No more was said on the subject.

CHAPTER XXVI.

MARIE MICHON felt great anxiety on learning that Madeleine had returned to the valley, for she had considered it as an understood matter that she should sleep at the hospital. She called upon her early the following morning, and found her sitting by the doorstep and reading. She seemed well, and in good spirits. Her friend felt unwilling to disturb this happy frame of mind; she, therefore, made no remark on her imprudence of the preceding evening, but merely asked her when she would settle at the hospital.

"When Lise comes back," answered Madeleine.

"And when is she to return?"

"After to-morrow."

Madeleine continued to exhibit the same quiet cheerfulness during the whole of the day, and Marie, who had business at the hospital, left her somewhat earlier than usual. She had not been long gone when M. Dubois made his appearance. It showed the winning power of Madeleine's nature, that it had warmed this selfish and narrow-minded man into something like a genial glow whenever she was concerned. This feeling displayed itself especially during her illness, when the mayor frequently called upon her, to bring her large nosegays of choice flowers from his own garden, as well as every little delicacy within his reach, and which he thought likely to tempt her palate in her languishing state. Madeleine was the more grateful for those attentions that she perfectly understood the character of the individual from whom they proceeded; their intercourse was therefore marked by mutual cordiality and good-will.

Like most ignorant persons, M. Dubois was convinced that, as long as a patient can eat and drink, the complaint is not fatal. His first questions, therefore, whenever he saw Madeleine, related to her

appetite ; and, as he generally received sufficiently satisfactory replies, he concluded that, though certainly very weak and languishing, she was not so ill as the doctor and most people thought. On this evening he found her looking better than usual. She was sitting on a chair near the door of her cottage, with her gray cloak wrapped around her person to protect her from the cool evening breeze. She did not seem to notice his approach, for her glance was fixed on the horizon, where the sun was setting with unusual splendour. The whole scene, with the lonely cottage and the quiet churchyard embosomed in the surrounding hills, and touched by the mellow light of departing day, was one of that deep and tranquil loveliness so seldom found. But its beauty was lost on M. Dubois' unpoetic eye. He only noticed Madeleine's thoughtful figure, and the glow which the sunset radiance that lingered around her imparted to her pale and wasted countenance.

"Well, Madeleine," said he, in a rough tone, for he was of opinion that invalids generally require to be roused up a little, "how do you feel this evening?"

Madeleine turned round quietly—nothing seemed to startle her now—and answered, that she felt pretty well.

"How is your appetite?" continued the mayor.

"I ate some of the chicken which you sent me to-day."

"Very well. I have brought something else in this basket, and these flowers too. Where shall I put them?"

"In the room, if you please, sir," answered Madeleine, thanking him for his kindness with a smile. "I should do it myself, but I feel so comfortable here that I do not like to go in yet."

"Indeed you must not stir. So," continued M. Dubois, when he had placed the basket and the flowers on a table in the first room of the cottage, and returned near Madeleine, "so you feel comfortable, do you?"

"Indeed I do, sir."

"Madeleine, I will tell you what!" knowingly observed the mayor, "you are getting better."

Madeleine smiled, but made no reply.

"Why, I was given up twice by the doctors, and yet I am alive and well, you see. You feel comfortable, that is one good sign. But what kind of a comfort is it?"

"It is more than comfort, it is happiness," said Madeleine, in a low tone, as her glance still dwelt on the gorgeous hues of the western sky.

"Happiness!" echoed M. Dubois.

"Yes, deep and solemn happiness — happiness which no words can tell," she fervently replied.

The mayor was satisfied, and did not seek to lead Madeleine into further conversation, as he knew that talking was injurious to her. He merely inquired when she expected Lise home, and whether she meant to return to the hospital.

"Lise is to come home after to-morrow," answered Madeleine, "and I shall go to the hospital very soon."

After a few insignificant remarks, M. Dubois left her, recommending her not to stay too long exposed to the night air, which advice Madeleine promised to follow.

As the mayor turned round the path leading to the village, he paused to look once more at Madeleine. The glow of the setting sun no longer lingered like a halo around her, and the cool gray hues of evening now shrouded the whole landscape; but she still sat in the same thoughtful attitude, motionless as a sculptured figure, with her glance fixed on the dim horizon, as though seeking, far beyond it, the unknown regions revealed to the spiritual eye alone.

Marie Michon was very much annoyed the next morning to receive a message from the relative with whom Lise was staying, and by which she requested to keep her niece a few days longer. On her way to Madeleine's cottage Marie reflected on the best manner of breaking this intelligence to her, for she had noticed that her friend looked forward to the

day of Lise's return with mingled anxiety and expectation. She felt the more vexed by this because, one of her patients being then dangerously ill, she should be obliged to return to the hospital in the course of the day. She resolved to do her utmost in order to induce Madeleine to accompany her, and she found so many plausible arguments in favour of this arrangement that she had little doubt of its success. It was still early when she reached the cottage, and Madeleine was not up. Marie raised the latch softly and entered the first room on tiptoe, for Madeleine's slumbers had lately been light and troubled, and she feared to waken her. She listened for a few minutes at the door of her room, but Madeleine's sleep was, she knew, as peaceful as that of a child, and she could hear no sound. "She sleeps; I must not disturb her," was Marie's inward ejaculation, as she sat down on a wooden stool to rest after her walk, as well as to reflect how she was to break the intelligence she had received concerning Lise to her friend, when she should awake.

But it seemed as if Madeleine would never wake, for though Marie began preparing the breakfast, and necessarily made some noise, no sound proceeded from the inner room. She at length resolved to enter it and waken her friend: she opened the door, and saw with surprise that Madeleine was lying already dressed on the bed, which looked as though it had not been undone. Had she spent this night also in vigil and prayer? The mere idea made Marie angry.

"Are you awake, Madeleine?" she asked, in a low tone. She received no reply. The shutters were closed. Marie's first act was to go to the window and open them; a stream of rich sunlight fell on the bed, and on the reclining form of the sleeping Madeleine. She was dressed as on the preceding evening, with her gray cloak partly wrapped around her. Her feet were crossed, her hands lay meekly folded on her breast, as if her last thought ere she fell asleep had been one of prayer; her head slightly reclined on her right shoulder, her eyes were closed as though

in a pure and holy slumber, and a serene smile lingered on her lips.

"How softly she must be breathing!" thought Marie. She drew near the bed on tiptoe, but still she heard nothing. How strange! She bent over the form of her friend, hushing her own breath to listen; yet all was silent. She pressed the slumberer's cheek with her own, but started back pale and trembling; that cheek was as cold as marble.

"Madeleine," she exclaimed, in a low husky voice, "speak to me; I am Marie; speak to me, Madeleine!" But though the same smile was on the pale lips, no voice answered her.

"She is asleep, fast asleep!" said Marie, taking up one of her hands between her own. The hand was colder than the cold cheek, and, when she let it go, it fell back listlessly. With desperate calmness she laid her hand upon Madeleine's heart; there also all was still. Then Marie knew that everything was over, and, clasping passionately the frail form which had lately been tenanted by a spirit so noble and so pure, she moaned and wept aloud in the bitterness of her anguish.

How long she remained thus Marie neither knew nor heeded, but her absence caused some alarm at the hospital, where she had promised to return at an early hour. The general impression was that Madeleine was worse, and towards noon several persons, with the parish priest at their head, determined to proceed to the valley. When they reached the cottage, the broken sounds of grief and wailing which proceeded from it, partly revealed the truth to them. On entering the inner room they found Marie kneeling by the bedside of her friend, one of whose hands lay clasped within her own. Her eyes never moved once from the countenance of Madeleine, and seemed to behold nothing else. She gave no reply to the questions addressed to her, but continued to rock herself to and fro, with a low plaintive moaning, which told of a grief too deep for utterance.

M. Bignon was the first to see how matters stood,

and, turning towards those who had accompanied him thither, he said, in a broken tone, "My friends, our Madeleine is gone away."

The words were but too well understood, as the loud exclamations of grief which immediately filled the room testified. The tidings soon reached the village, and, though few felt surprise—for the declining state of Madeleine's health had long been known—every one repeated, in a tone of deep sorrow, "Our Madeleine is gone away." It was strange, yet touching, that none spoke of her as being dead, but rather as they might have done of a stranger from some distant country, who had dwelt among them for a few brief years, shedding blessings with her gentle presence, but who, when her task of love was done, had returned once more to her own home.

Though this feeling gave a peculiar nature to the sorrow of the inhabitants of Mont-Saint-Jean, it could neither banish it, nor the wish which all felt of gazing once more upon Madeleine. "We must see her again!" was the general exclamation, and for two days the cottage was thronged by sad and reverent visitors. The body, near which Marie still sat, watching it with unwearied love, had been left lying on the bed exactly as she had found it, with the gray cloak wrapped around it, the feet crossed, and the hands meekly folded. The pallid countenance still wore that smile, which had not deserted it even in death. The whole attitude was so fraught with modest grace and purity, the features looked so calm and serene in their eternal slumber, that many scrupled not to aver that Madeleine had been ministered unto by angels in her last hour, like the saints of the old legends. Some even declared, with the poetical fancies of their imaginative race, that several travellers, who passed by the churchyard on the night during which her pure spirit had fled, had heard strains of ravishing and unearthly melody floating from her abode.

It was in vain for M. Bignon to protest, in the name of Madeleine herself, against this belief; it was

too well suited to the character of the people not to be universally adopted, and it soon became one of the most popular and cherished traditions of that part of Auvergne.

The mystery which attended Madeleine's last hours was never cleared up. M. Détrimont declared that death had taken place without a struggle, and probably during sleep. The state of the bed, the fact of her being dressed, and the withered flowers which were found where M. Dubois had placed them, all tended to confirm the general surmise, that, shortly after the mayor left her, Madeleine had entered her cottage, and, feeling drowsy, had laid down on her bed to take a short slumber, from which she had never awakened.

Amongst those who came to see Madeleine ere her remains were consigned to their mother earth was M. Dubois. He had heard of her death with a kind of incredulous stupor, and when he saw her looking so like what she had been, and yet felt that he stood in the presence of death, he turned his head away and wept like a child.

The funeral took place on the third day. The body was placed in a coffin covered with a white pall, and a white bridal wreath at the head, to show that the tenant had lived in the maiden state; it was borne to the village church by eight young girls, likewise clad in white; a ninth walked behind, carrying the banner of a religious fraternity to which Madeleine had belonged, according to the general custom of the country. The little church was filled to overflowing, for the news of the death of the "gray cloak of the hills" had spread far beyond Mont-Saint-Jean, and collected a large concourse of individuals. M. Bignon preached no funeral sermon; he ascended the pulpit, however, with the intention of making a brief discourse, but, when he had uttered his text,

"This woman was full of good works and alms-deeds, which she did." Acts, ix. 36, he could proceed no further, and sank back on the seat, a prey to uncontrollable emotion. Nor was any sermon needed, for the tears of those whom Madeleine

had relieved during her lifetime showed that the text had been well understood.

When the service was over the young girls once more resumed their burden, and carried the coffin along the path leading to the churchyard, preceded by M. Bignon and several clergymen of the neighbouring parishes, attired in their sacerdotal garments, and chanting in a low and solemn tone according to the ritual of the Catholic Church. Behind the girl who carried the banner came Marie Michon, leading Lise by the hand; the child wept bitterly, but, though Marie's whole frame quivered in the intensity of her emotion, she did not shed a tear: she was followed by all the inhabitants of the hospital whom infirmity or ill-health did not keep at home. M. Dubois, with his tri-colour scarf, came next, but his woe-begone countenance contrasted so much with his general appearance on such occasions, that nothing could have revealed more truly the depth and the sincerity of his grief. Doctor Détriment walked near him, looking grave and sad; but he had foreseen Madeleine's death too long to be so painfully affected as those on whom the blow had fallen more unexpectedly. Behind them followed slowly and silently a large crowd of mourners, consisting of almost all the inhabitants of Mont-Saint-Jean, with many persons from the neighbouring villages. The men were all bare-headed, and carried their cloth caps in their hands.

It was about two hours before the procession, which moved at a slow pace, reached the churchyard. On the preceding day Marie, whose grief and devoted affection gave her a sort of claim on her deceased friend, had been asked where she would have her laid, and she had sadly answered, "Let it be by the stone cross where she loved to sit."

But as it was known that Madeleine had often expressed a wish of being buried near her father, the old man's grave was opened, and the coffin containing his remains placed beforehand near the spot destined to receive his daughter. As the churchyard could not contain all the individuals present, a large

number stationed themselves in Madeleine's garden, whence they could behold all that passed. Notwithstanding the large numbers who were thus assembled together, the greatest order prevailed, and even the appearance of confusion was carefully avoided. Though sincere sorrow was felt by every one, there were at first no outbursts of violent grief. Madeleine had been universally beloved; but it was more with the love and reverence felt for some holy being, than with the affection lavished on frail and earthly creatures. But when the coffin had been lowered into the grave, and the first shovelful of earth fell upon it with a hollow sound, Marie sank down on her knees with a strong convulsive sob. This seemed the signal for the display of whatever signs of emotion had been suppressed till then. For a few minutes the churchyard was filled with the voice of lamentation, and the proceedings were interrupted. By a strong effort M. Bignon at length regained his composure, and resumed his painful duties. His example served to check whatever ebullitions of grief might otherwise have been displayed, and the ceremony was concluded in the sorrowful silence of the surrounding crowd. When everything was over the mourners slowly departed, and the little churchyard was left once more to its silence and solitude.

A few days after the funeral gloomy Pierre came to Mont-Saint-Jean, in order to see Madeleine, as was his custom whenever he visited the neighbourhood. He heard of her death with more sorrow than surprise.

"Ay," he sadly exclaimed, "any one who marked her look and smile could have known that she was not to be long of this world!"

He paid a brief visit to her grave, and never failed to go to the churchyard for that purpose when his labour called him within a few leagues of the place.

About a month after the death of Madeleine, the people of Mont-Saint-Jean began to think that they would not be showing a proper respect for her memory unless they erected a monument over her grave. But

this plan, though advocated by M. Dubois, was strenuously opposed by M. Bignon. "Madeleine's noblest monument," he said, "was the hospital she had founded; and he moreover felt convinced that nothing would have given her more offence than such a project, could she have known of it."

This latter argument prevailed, and a simple marble slab was placed at the head of her grave. But M. Dubois now felt anxious to have all Madeleine's virtues recorded by a suitable epitaph. This was again opposed by M. Bignon.

"What could an epitaph tell us?" he observed; "that Madeleine was good, pious, and devoted to the poor? But if we cause this to be inscribed on her grave, will it not be thought we required to be told the virtues she possessed? Trust me, let

MADELEINE

be engraved on the tombstone which marks the spot where she lies, and we shall all know what that means?"

This advice was followed literally, and the simple name she had borne during her mortal life was the peasant girl's sole epitaph.

Years have passed away since Madeleine lived and died amongst the hills of Auvergne, and, though unknown beyond them, there she has not been forgotten. "The gray cloak of the hills," is still remembered in many of the mountain legends. Her quiet figure, low, gentle voice, and peculiarities of attire, have been faithfully preserved by tradition. The spot where she lived is still shown, though the cottage has fallen into ruins; but the garden belonging to it, and which is now possessed by one of the heirs of M. Dubois, is kept in proper order, for the sake of the fruit and vegetables it produces. No weeds have been allowed to grow near her grave, and, though the marble slab is partly broken, her name is still legible upon it, the envious moss, which has often attempted to efface the letters, being always carefully removed by the village sexton.

With the events which followed the death of Madeleine this history has nothing to do, nor were they in any manner remarkable. In the course of a few years good M. Bignon, who to his last hour retained an affectionate and reverential remembrance of Madeleine, whom he always associated with the memory of M. Morel, slept in the little churchyard with his predecessors, the humble pastors of Mont-Saint-Jean. M. Dubois died about the same time; but Marie Michon survived her friend no less than twenty-five years. According to her dying request, she was laid in death at the feet of her whom she had loved through life, with an affection so devoted and so pure.

As Lise died young, none of those whom Madeleine loved are now living. But the good which we do passes not away with us, and the hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean still exists in a thriving condition, to attest the heroic devotedness of a simple peasant girl in the cause of the poor. Though the donations of wealthy and benevolent individuals have greatly improved this asylum of the sick and the aged in size and accommodation, those who dwell within its walls have not forgotten her to whom they owe the blessings they enjoy; and, according to her request, the name of Madeleine is still remembered in their daily orisons. Marie Michon always declared she could not believe her friend's pure spirit needed those prayers, even whilst she complied with her wish; and the custom has been continued since her time by the inmates of the hospital, simply as a mode of commemorating their benefactress.

The number of those who knew Madeleine personally decreases every year, but her memory is still preserved with deep reverence and affection in her native place; and those who were children when she died, love to speak of the gentle girl, once the Providence of their wild hills, and who founded the Hospital of Mont-Saint-Jean.

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